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ABSTRACT

This monograph examines the phenomenon of young children who lack the socialization and academic preparation needed to meet the demands of schooling and take advantage of educational programs. Such children have inadequately nurtured bodies and incompletely or inappropriately stimulated minds. The changing nature of childhood is portrayed in subsections on poverty and young children, detachment from empowering adults, and pressures to flee childhood prematurely. Four prerequisites for academic success that involve nutrition and health, social and familial relationships, interaction with environments and adults, and a sense of individuality and self-worth are discussed. This discussion is followed by a consideration of four cornerstones of growth in the early years that must be firmly established before formal schooling begins. The monograph then offers three case studies of at-risk children that illustrate today's challenges to traditional systems of early elementary schooling. Case studies focus on children who function only with difficulty as competent, independent learners in the classroom. Concluding discussion explores directions for change, including teacher-designed developmental interventions with at-risk children; teacher advocacy on behalf of children in need; and teacher intervention for change in educational and social administration and policy making. Over 80 references are cited. (RH)

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Early Childhood At Risk:

Actions and Advocacy for Young Children

by Victoria Jean Dimidjian

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AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

For my mother, Helen Johnson Halboth, a special educator who helped children find the power of speech; and for my daughters, Sona and Karina, who are just entering the professions caring for the needs of children.

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction 5

2. The Changing Face of Childhood 7
   - Poverty and Young Children 9
   - Detachment from Empowering Adults 13
   - Pressures to Flee Childhood Prematurely 19

3. The Prerequisites for Academic Success 22

4. Three Children of the Eighties 24
   - Petey 25
   - Sean 30
   - Jeremy 34
   - Conclusion 39

5. The Splintered World of Early Childhood Education 40

6. Directions for Change 47
   - Teacher as Change Agent in the Classroom: Designing Developmental Interventions 47
   - Teacher as Change Agent in Society: Advocacy for Children in Need 54
   - Change and Intervention on Administrative and Policymaking Levels 56

Bibliography 59

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history and across the world today, the family functions to socialize young children, preparing them for learning the words, tool usages, and behaviors that enable each child to become an integrated and contributing member of society. Family members—whether in Spain or Zaire or South Philly—join with other members of their society to assist the child in gaining the skills of "how to do," or what Erickson has called the "sense of industry," during the years between the dependency of early childhood and the independence of young adulthood. Truly, to paraphrase poet Philip Brooks, the future of the human race marches forth on little feet.

In the industrialized countries of the modern world, the family's function in preparing, socializing, and readying the child for more formal learning, thereby gaining the tools of postindustrial society—the skills of reading, mathematical and computer manipulation, analytic thinking, and oral presentation of ideas and arguments—has shown an ever-increasing partnership with educational and social institutions. A generation ago it was the unusual child who entered formal schooling in first grade with extensive earlier school experience. Most often the child had attended a part-day enrichment nursery school or kindergarten that supplemented the care, stimulation, and socialization provided in the home environment. Today it is the unusual child who does not have early and extensive involvement with some type of group experience, whether in child care, home-based arrangements, nursery or prekindergarten classrooms, or early intervention programs for particular types of children/families in need.

But how many of these new students entering their first days of "formal" education in primary classrooms are truly ready for the tasks awaiting them? Early elementary teachers describe the vast range in readiness and skill levels shown by groups of six- to eight-year-olds. Some argue for earlier, more stringent skill-based learning procedures to make up for the lacks so evidenced; others stress the maturation, intervention, and remediation that must first take place. Yet both sides agree that increasing numbers of elementary-school-age children evidence severe behavioral and academic difficulties.

James Comer has eloquently addressed the long-term implications of inadequate early socialization and academic preparation of our nation's

children (19).* He emphasizes the importance of the early years, establishing both social and intellectual frameworks within the developing child. Those frameworks then are completed in the middle and secondary school years, resulting in *either* active social participation and economic self-sufficiency *or* economic/political dysfunction. His words about the youngest students highlight our democratic society's dilemma:

> Children from families in economic distress are often well cared for physically, but their parents may not be able to give them the kind of preschool development that will lead to academic success, even when they aspire to potentially available opportunities. Some such young people are prepared to achieve in school but attend schools in which the staff, other students, or both, make high level academic learning difficult. Children from the most stressed and troubled families often enter school greatly underdeveloped along the pathways most necessary for academic success. (19, p. 193)

This monograph examines the increasing phenomenon of young children whose bodies have been inadequately nurtured, whose personalities have been inadequately socialized, and whose minds have been incompletely or inappropriately stimulated. The monograph highlights growing numbers of children who climb the long stairways to primary classrooms without the inner foundations for academic success having been built, children who trouble teachers with their immature or developmentally inconsistent behaviors, children who flounder at the starting line as others begin to learn the strokes that will make entering the swimming meet of independent learning possible. After examining the four cornerstones of growth in the early years that *must* be firmly established before beginning the world of formal schooling, the monograph offers three case studies of at-risk children to illustrate the challenges presented to traditional systems of early elementary schooling today. Finally, it explores directions for change on multiple levels: teacher interventions with children at risk; teacher advocacy on behalf of children; and educational/social system changes to ensure that all children gain the prerequisites necessary for academic success.

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Bibliography beginning on page 59.

2. THE CHANGING FACE OF CHILDHOOD

Since the 1960s, educators and researchers have focused concern and intervention programs to assist families with young children. The enduring importance of the early years is culturally accepted even if developmentalists argue about the exact percentage of formation that takes place before formal school entrance. Additionally, research during the past ten years has highlighted the increasing numbers of at-risk children who do not receive the necessities for early growth and development. Over the past decade, the vulnerable face of childhood in America has been first distorted, now deeply scarred by three influences:

- *Poverty* and all its attendant problems
- Detachment from *empowering adults*, particularly parents who encourage language, affirm curiosity and active thinking and problem-solving skills, and strengthen prosocial behaviors through modeling and face-to-face interactions in home and school
- *Pressures* to abandon learning through play; pressures to become pseudomature learners and peers.

Any *one* of these factors occurring during the early years will impact on the vulnerability of the developing child, putting that child at some degree of risk for enduring cognitive and social damage. The degree of vulnerability in a particular child cannot be determined beforehand; studies by Rutter (57), Cochran and Brassard (17), Garber and Seligman (33), Garmezy and Rutter (36), and Werner and Smith (80) have pointed to the inherent resiliency of some children, while others show developmental delays and damage by smaller stress factors.

The importance of education and family support systems in assisting "resilient" high-risk children is well illustrated in Werner's recent longitudinal study of the approximately 10 percent of 698 high-risk subjects who have shown resiliency over the 32 years they have been studied (79). Three factors have contributed to their resiliency: temperament and disposition; emotionally supportive family ties; and external supports, particularly those from schools. There the resilient children established skills and an internalized belief (or locus of control) in their own efficacy that

made possible higher levels of educational achievement, work accomplishments and promotions, and social/geographic mobility.

In addition to the inherent coping capabilities of the individual child, risk must also be factored by the degree of severity, the time of impact in the child's life, and the number of risk factors impinging upon the child's development. Recent work by Sameroff (1, 58, 59) has shown the dramatic impact of multiple coinciding stressors in the lives of young children and their families, emphasizing that family systems cannot accommodate high numbers of stressors without aberrant or deviant behaviors.

Perhaps a metaphor for growth in the early years will make clear the dynamic interaction of forces on the young child's development. Imagine a long waterslide coming down the side of a gentle, rolling mountain. Children entering the slide at the top begin a descent propelled by *their own weight* (vulnerability/resilience); the *tilt* of the slide (too much causing danger of too steep a descent, perhaps catapulting them over the slide's edge, too little being understimulating); and the *momentum built up* on the ride down the slide (so like the stable patterns established in the early years that make progressive and incremental growth possible). Now, if a bump on the slide downward should occur, the child who is centered and has a strong momentum and some sliding skills will probably be able to negotiate the challenge, not be thrown off course or hurt. Or if the whole slide is suddenly jarred and thrown off course, the child who has made the journey well thus far down the middle of the slide, building up strong momentum and managing the turns well up to that point, will probably make it successfully to the bottom of the track. But the child just beginning the passage down the slope may be totally thrown off course, damaged by the external forces that have distorted the slide and broken the flow of the downward ride. The younger the child, the more vulnerable he or she will be to external interference in normal growth and development.

In that sense, then, the dynamic combination of *internal* factors within a particular child and the *ecological* factors so well described by Bronfenbrenner (6, 8, 9) coalesce during the early years to establish a pattern of growth and development; the increasing stress factors of poverty, detachment from empowering adults, and pressure all present potential detriments to healthy growth. Taken together, as too often happens today, the resulting picture is of a child angry, distrustful, mentally disorganized, and at severe risk for failure in the formal school setting. Examination of each of the at-risk factors as separate contributing stresses makes it possible to understand how the dynamic interaction of such factors may distort a child's development, especially as illustrated in the three vignettes in Chapter 4.

POVERTY AND YOUNG CHILDREN

The United States leads the industrialized nations of the world in the numbers of young children growing up in poverty. Today over 25 percent of youngsters under six have families with incomes below the poverty line (20). Between 1970 and 1987 the poverty rate of children increased from 15 to 20 percent (67, p. 873). Economists comparing this increase with the decreasing rate in other industrialized countries voice alarm at comparisons like those shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Children in Poverty

		Percent in poverty
Sweden	All families with children	5.1
	One-parent families	8.6
West Germany	All families with children	8.2
	One-parent families	35.1
Canada	All families with children	9.6
	One-parent families	38.7
England	All families with children	10.7
	One-parent families	38.6
United States	All families with children	17.1
	One-parent families	51.0

Adapted from Timothy Smeeding and Barbara Torrey, "Poor Children in Rich Countries," *Science*, November 11, 1988, p. 874.

Moreover, even though two-thirds of poor children in the United States are white, a minority child is at greater risk for growing up in poverty. Today 43 percent of Black children and 40 percent of Hispanic young are poor (72). The average Black child survives five of the first 15 years of growth in a poverty-income home (20). In 1985, minorities made up 17 percent of America's population but demographic predictions project that by 2020 that percentage will be doubled, with minorities making up one-third of the nation's peoples (42). The risk that a large percentage of this large component of the nation's population will have endured childhoods scarred by poverty is staggering to contemplate.

Over the past six years the Children's Defense Fund has raised public awareness of the impact of poverty. In its query of political candidates'

social programs for addressing this issue in the 1988 election, the Fund reminded candidates:

> Children make up the poorest age group in America. One in four of all preschoolers and one in five of all children are poor; among children born into single-parent households, one in two is poor; among children of teenage single mothers, 84.4 percent are poor; and among children with two parents younger than 22, one in three is poor. (14, p. 8)

The founder and director of the Fund, Marian Wright Edelman, has published a series of addresses on the plight of poor families and the apparent trend that this generation of poor children may become a "permanent underclass" within American society. She notes the stark realities of preschoolers' lives today and the risk to the next generation if such a proportion of the young become nonproductive citizens:

> In the next century we will need the contributions of every child in the United States today. Yet we are far from meeting our national and community responsibilities to all children to make that possible. This is a perilous course, for the future is being shaped right now. The potential high school graduate in the year 2000 is now a preschooler. One in four of today's preschool children is poor; one in nine is living in a household with income less than half of the poverty level. Only 16 percent of these eligible poor children are enrolled in Head Start, and only half can expect to be given compensatory education when they go to elementary school in the next couple of years. One child in six lives in a female-headed household, one in eight has no health insurance, and one in ten has not seen a doctor in the past year. One in two has a working mother, but only one in five has adequate day care. One in six lives in a family where no parent has a job, one in five is likely to become a teen parent, and one in seven is likely to drop out of school. (28, p. 31)

> These disturbing trends are reversible, through thoughtful public and private leadership that seeks a fairer balance between economic security for families to combat the internal enemies of hunger, homelessness and joblessness and military security to combat external threats to national security; and between the desires and luxuries of the "haves" and the basic needs of the "have nots" in American society. (28, p. 37)

Business leaders share Edelman's concern about the children who will enter adulthood in the first years of the coming century. But the business community has identified another social issue presented by the threat of a permanent underclass of society: that our nation will lack a viable work force for the competitive international economy of tomorrow. As the prestigious Committee for Economic Development has recently noted:

> If present trends continue without corrective actions, American business will confront a severe employment crisis. The scarcity of well-educated and well-qualified people in the work force will seriously damage this country's competitive position in an increasingly challenging global marketplace. Current projections point to a serious labor shortage in only a few years. By 1990, the impact of new technologies is expected to drive total private-sector demand for employment to 156.6 million jobs, nearly twice that in 1978. If these estimates are only close to the mark, there will be a shortage of over 23 million Americans willing and able to work. (20, p. 4)

One of the most direct consequences of poverty is malnutrition in the young. In a review of 20 studies done in the United States from 1982–1986, J. Larry Brown concludes that 12 million children are currently going hungry because of "an economy that leaves many families below the poverty level and a social-welfare system that gives them insufficient help" (11, p. 41). Brown links the inadequate nutrition of mothers with low birth-weight babies and the growing infant mortality rate in the United States, higher than that of 17 other industrialized nations. Additionally, lowered growth rate after birth is also linked to poverty. For example, the 1983 Massachusetts Nutritional Survey found that over 18 percent of young low-income children showed "chronic nutritional deficiency" (cited in 14). In the first two years when both body and brain should be growing at the highest rate, poor children fall behind. Brown notes that as the poorly fed child's metabolism slows and growth rate diminishes, overt physical harm may not be indicated, but the infant may "yet be deprived of social and cognitive experiences that advance development" (14, p. 39). Hungry babies do not smile and coo in response to the social smile; half-nourished toddlers do not tug at the Busy Box or dash after the ball; and inadequately nourished preschoolers may stare quietly at the shelf of blocks or the waiting easel and paints during their first mornings of Head Start *if* they are among the small percentage able to attend. Clearly the residue of inadequate nourishment remains evident in the body and the mind and feelings of young children.

In addition to diminished physical health and growth, poverty has been clearly linked to slowed social and cognitive growth as well. The wealth of data in the 1960s provided stark contrasts of children growing up in poverty in accounts like Harrington's *The Other America* (39) with research by leaders like Piaget, Bloom, and Hunt whose work showed the enormous cognitive growth made in the first six years by children whose minds were nurtured and stimulated. Such information motivated the War on Poverty and efforts at early intervention with young children and their families, particularly the only survivor from that time, Head Start.

The enduring accomplishments of that program—whose first "graduates" are now college age, many of whom have gone on to higher education—are widely accepted today. Data gathered longitudinally on intervention with low-income children since the 1960s (e.g., 7, 16, 18, 65, 78) clearly evidences that quality early education results in cognitive and social gains that, once established, tend to remain. Continued underfunding of Head Start, however, means that fewer than one in five eligible children is able to participate in this form of early intervention. Some states, notably Washington and California, have taken action to address the numbers of children in need. On the statewide level, Barbara Day's review (24) of twenty-one states that have instituted forms of early childhood education to provide patterns of care, education, and/or intervention shows the widely varying resources and contrasting services across the country. Day concludes, "What's happening in early childhood programs can be summarized in two words—growth and uncertainty" (24, p. 27). She identifies the national challenges as threefold: retaining focus on the individual needs of young children, establishing cooperative curriculum planning and program implementation encompassing preschool/kindergarten/primary grades that are child developmentally oriented, and involving all early childhood constituencies.

The other attendant problems of poverty-reared young children are graphically evidenced by an even casual review of the front page of a major city newspaper. For example, on December 22, 1988, *The New York Times* published the following lead articles on young children and—

- Homelessness: A hotel for the homeless in Portland, Oregon, showed how effective intervention was achieved when counseling/rehabilitation/job placement services were combined with provision of shelter in a home-like setting, illustrated by a young mother in the window of her "home" with hope for the first time in her 21 years.
- Inadequate housing in crime-ridden neighborhoods: A mother and her nine-month-old live in a city-owned building without heat or hot water. Upon calling repeatedly to complain, the mother inadvertently reached the mayor who then assisted directly in the family's survival.
- Child abuse/neglect: The ongoing headline cases of two murdered children, six-year-old Lisa Steinberg and five-year-old Jessica Cortez, continue to haunt the front pages of major newspapers and magazines as government, school, and local communities review in horror the evidence that each child suffered years of abuse without any protection by adults, including teachers and family members.

DETACHMENT FROM EMPOWERING ADULTS

As the vignettes cited above so starkly illustrate, the stabilizing and protective social bonds that should link the members of families who are rearing children with the larger social world appear fraying under the stresses of the times. More and more children are growing up alone or confined to their peer group for support and stability; fewer and fewer are able to rely upon and grow progressively independent from the care and protection of adults, particularly parents and teachers. Urie Bronfenbrenner prophetically warned about this trend:

> As we read the evidence, both from our own research and that of others, we cannot escape the conclusion that, if the current trend persists, if the institutions of our society continue to remove parents, other adults, and older youth from active participation in the lives of children, and if the resulting vacuum is filled by the age-segregated peer group, *we can anticipate increased alienation, indifference, antagonism, and violence on the part of the younger generation in all segments of our society—middle-class children as well as the disadvantaged.* (6, pp. 116–17)

Nearly 20 years later, Bronfenbrenner's words echo as we look at the rise of child abuse/neglect cases. The Children's Defense Fund reports that 1.9 million children were neglected or abused in 1986, a 50 percent increase since 1981 (14). And in 1985 about 275,000 children were living in foster homes or institutions after being removed from the care of their biological families (14).

Even among children growing up in the physical domain of their biological family, however, the social and emotional fabric of the family is fraying. More young mothers are returning to work earlier in their children's lives. Propelled by the converging forces of economic necessity, changing social roles and increasing educational/professional opportunities, young women today assume that combining the responsibilities of work and family life will fall into place easily. But that assumption is sorely challenged, often shattered, as families search for adequate child care. Most turn to some form of in-home care where family monitoring of the quality care is to some degree possible and costs are relatively low. In 1982 about 77 percent of infants/toddlers were cared for in home settings, while only 10 percent were placed in center care. By 1985 center care was provided for about 24 percent of the very young (20). More than half of all married mothers with infants/toddlers work. The Children's Defense Fund projects that by 1995 two-thirds of all preschool children and four-fifths of school agers will have working mothers. What this means is that more than 15 million children will need some form of supplemental care.

Yet the child care picture in America today is bleak. It can be characterized by three phrases: *patchwork* in structure; *piecemeal* and *starkly inequitable* in quality of services provided; and in cases of children already at risk, even potentially harmful.

The patchwork quality of child care has been identified as a major stressor in the lives of families in need of affordable, dependable care for their young children since the movement of women with children into the work force began in the late sixties. The passage in 1971 of the Mondale-Brademas bill for comprehensive child care on the national level was hailed as the beginning of a solution. This bill would have enacted national standards and regulation, ensuring provision of services to families throughout the country. It was vetoed by then-President Nixon, however, and Congress could not override that veto. Although child care legislation has been proposed annually since that time, and although the visibly apparent public perception is that the nation must establish some type of child-care service, no national policy on day care has yet been established.

Some states and localities have filled the gap, adopting standards and establishing systems of service to families in their areas. Some areas have even mobilized the combined resources of the social services and the public education system. Pomona County in California, for example, has a countywide system of child care in 15 centers, 13 of which are in the public schools, serving children from infancy to elementary age. Parents pay for service according to family income. And although more than 900 children are served currently, more than 1,000 remain on the waiting list. Obtaining adequate and affordable child care remains a working parent's pressing problem. Contrasting this country's child-care system with those of other industrialized nations, Sheila Kamerman points out:

> Needless to say, child care is the most important issue for working mothers in every country. As in the United States, it is more of a problem for women with preschoolage children. For most women in most European countries, care of children from about age three to compulsory school age (five, six, or seven depending on the country) is far less of a problem. That is because most children of this age ... attend voluntarily a free, public preschool program, covering the normal school day—regardless of whether or not their parents work. (45, p. 139)

And in interpreting this difference in policy of family support, Kamerman concludes:

> Clearly, the responsibility of the development of support systems for families, making it possible for adults to carry both sets of responsibilities (home and work) at the same time, can only come from the soci-

> ety at large, with society using government as its instrument. Only through publicly guaranteed entitlements can all families benefit, not just some employees whose employers will then feel paralyzed as they make some special benefits. (45, p. 168)

The inequalities in the provision of quality care and the potential harm to the growing child that can result from inadequate care present grave concerns to parents and community members who want to ensure that every child may thrive. Historically an artificial distinction has been built in our society between "care" of young children and "early education." Since the beginning of this century, child care has been viewed as a custodial service, something to be used by "deficient" families when they are not able to make provisions for care independently. Thus standards set by states and local communities have often been only "custodial" and minimal, ensuring physical protection, enforced by agencies of social welfare or public assistance. In contrast, standards for "education" of the young focus also on the physical well-being of the growing child but additionally emphasize the need for both social and cognitive growth experiences. This split is epitomized in a state like my own, Pennsylvania, where quality early childhood programs that provide education and all-day care options go through two licensing procedures. Two certificates, one from the department of public welfare and the other from the department of education, hang side by side. Legislators and educators decry this artificial distinction. It has tended to make child care and the provision of day-care services less socially acceptable, and it contributes to the status and pay of the average child caregiver, which are lower than in almost any job category, far lower than in any other college-degree employment.

The recently issued report of the National Association of State Boards of Education addresses this issue aptly. In *Right from the Start*, the NASBE Task Force on Early Childhood Education exhorts school boards, educators, and community members across the country to collaborate and expand as well as improve the existing child-care services, both within and external to the public school system. Recognizing the enormous impact that quality of care has on the developing young child, the report states:

> The Task Force heard a wide spectrum of opinions on the "child care and the public schools" debate....
>
> We believe that in the future schools will play an increasing role in early childhood programs, including in some cases, the provision of full-day services for younger children and before- and after-school services for school-age children. In order to support both parental choice and the existing child-care delivery system, the schools must join in a partnership with other community-based early childhood programs.

> We believe that the degree and type of public school involvement in child care will vary depending on community needs and available resources. In some cases schools may need to directly provide or sponsor full-day services to preschoolers and/or before-and-after school services for children in elementary grades. Where this occurs, we caution schools to avoid the false distinction between care and education. Full-day programs should not be seen as providing a half-day of education and a half-day of child care. In other communities, schools may choose not to provide services directly but to collaborate with existing programs. (55, pp. 26–27)

Without the concerted, coordinated, and cooperative efforts of families, community members, and professionals in social/educational institutions working together for the comprehensive provision of child-care services that are accessible, affordable, and available to every family, the haunting spectacle of harmful out-of-home care that regularly emerges in the local and national media will continue. The whole nation worried about the rescue of two-year-old Jessica McClure from the Texas well several years ago, but few voiced concern that the well was part of an unlicensed, overcrowded child-care facility. The nation's "rescue mentality" can be mobilized for one child in need. But generalizing that mentality to ensure that each growing child receives supplemental care in out-of-family settings that strengthens the growth process is today's task. Until that happens, the day-care child remains at some degree of risk.

More than a decade ago Selma Fraiberg examined the pitfalls and potential harm in our patchwork system, producing a scathing indictment of the inadequate child-care system. She described the dilemma of mothers, especially those in poverty, who had to choose between providing for the physical survival of their families and maintaining optimal human relationships with their children since, while they were at work, their children often ended up in revolving-door caregiving relationships. She concluded irately:

> The mother who must work for personal or financial reasons has poor options for her preschool children. If she is looking for substitute mother care in a home or a school she will learn that such care will be hard to find "at any price." For the poor and the socially disadvantaged families, who are a majority in this particular population, a mother's options are usually so limited that "substitute mother care" and "education" are not even among her choices. Children already disadvantaged by poverty, poor nutrition, health problems, domestic stress and confusion, and the risks of high-delinquency neighborhoods, spend their days "at a neighbor's," or several neighbors or relatives in the course of a week, or in a "center" which more likely than not is a storage place for babies and preschool children which, licensed or unli-

censed, may offer nothing more than a hot lunch and distracted and overburdened, untrained caregivers. (32, pp. 87–88)

In the decade since Fraiberg's indictment, much growth and improvement have occurred in the day-care sector. In part, this is due to the demands of increasing numbers of affluent, highly motivated professionals who want to ensure that child care will give their young the early preparation that their counterparts may be receiving in home or nursery settings. It is also due to the fact that public perception of child care as a social responsibility—not unlike national health care or services for the elderly—is now widespread even though public provision of these services to all members of society continues to fall short of the needed congressional votes for enactment. In a recent study of child care as one form of family support, Purdue professor Douglas Powell states that if day care is to thrive outside the "network of kin," it must provide appropriate "match between quality day care resources and family needs" as well as high levels of ongoing communication between caregivers and parents (43, p. 130). With these attributes and further research to substantiate how these assist in early growth, Powell says day care will truly become a family support service, now only a potentiality in most cases.

What are the potential child-care options for working parents today? They run the gamut from professional service systems that are developmentally enhancing for the child and family-supportive for working parents to warehouses or custodially run centers where children are thrown together in random activities under the supervision of little-prepared and poorly paid adults. The need for skilled professional services seems even more pressing when we recall the increasing number of young families undergoing separation/divorce or attempting to rear young children in one-parent households. As of 1985, about 22 percent of American children lived in single-parent homes, a figure that has doubled over the past 20 years (73). Of the children being reared in one-parent households, nearly two-thirds are offspring of families who have experienced separation/divorce as shown in Table 2. Typically the income level of the single-parent family has been drastically reduced during divorce. In 1985 47.5 percent of female-headed households were below the poverty level, while over 70 percent of Black female-headed families fell below that line (72).

In addition to income reduction and the economic stresses of divorce, this phenomenon also often results in physical and psychological role overload for the custodial parent. If unassisted by external supports and relationships, she—for over 90 percent of custodial parents are mothers—may not have adequate internal resources to respond to her growing child's needs. Her withdrawal and continuing unavailability just at the

Table 2
Children in One-Parent Households

Child with divorced parent	41.9%
Child with never-married parent	24.%
Child with separated parent	23.0%
Child with widowed parent	7.6%
Child with married parent whose spouse is absent	3.5%

Cited in Lawrence Schiamberg, *Child and Adolescent Development*, p. 466 (Macmillan 1988), from data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1985.

time when the child is suffering separation from the departing parent may result in patterns of aggression, hostility, erratic school performance, regression and dependency, isolation and other signals of emotional distress so well documented in the research on the impact of divorce on children by Wallerstein and Kelly (75, 77) and Gardner (34, 35).

These studies as well as many others (e.g., 41, 50, 76) have shown, however, that divorce need not debilitate any member of the family system. With regular and supportive contact between child and noncustodial parent, with emotional understanding and support by the child-care center or preschool program, and with supportive assistance from extended family and nonfamilial but caring others, parents, and young children can establish harmonious and stable single-parent households. But the social support provided through the coordinated efforts of the staff in an early childhood program working closely and empathically with a divorcing family can ***only*** be accomplished if staff in the program are well trained, skilled, and continuously involved as a stable support system. Instead, much child care is provided today by revolving-door caregivers, part-time employees paid minimum wages, supervised by a professionally trained person who may stay in that position only until another better-paying position opens. Caregiver turnover rates run as high as 40 to 60 percent in some child-care programs. The fast-in and fast-out movement of adults and children in some centers has given rise to the ironic characterization of child-care profit-making industries as "Kentucky Fried Children." Fragmented human relationships—whether in homes or in preschools, child-care centers or classrooms—cannot promote the psychological stability and adaptive coping that young children desperately need when they are undergoing difficult events like family discord, divorce, or economic stress.

PRESSURES TO FLEE CHILDHOOD PREMATURELY

Finally, developmentalists in the past decade have been voicing warnings about the erosion of childhood. Due to the multiple stresses parents are experiencing today, they often push or nudge their child into new developmental steps prematurely. They may expect or even demand behaviors advanced beyond the capabilities of the dependent young. In his bestseller *The Hurried Child*, David Elkind, past-president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, struck a note of widespread cultural concern:

> The concept of childhood, so vital to the traditional American way of life, is threatened with extinction in the society we have created. Today's child has become the unwilling, unintended victim of overwhelming stress—stress borne of rapid, bewildering social change and constantly rising expectations. The contemporary parent dwells in a pressure cooker of competing demands, transitions, role changes, personal and professional uncertainties, over which he or she exerts slight direction. We seek release from stress whenever we can, and usually the one sure ambit of our control is the home. Here, if nowhere else, we enjoy the fact (or illusion) of playing a determining role. If childrearing necessarily entails stress, then by hurrying children to grow up, or by treating them as adults, we hope to remove a portion of our burden of worry and anxiety and to enlist our children's aid in carrying life's load. We do not mean our children harm in acting thus—on the contrary, as a society we have come to imagine that it is good for young people to mature rapidly. Yet we do our children harm when we hurry them through childhood. (29, p. 3)

In this excellent work and sequels (*All Grown Up and No Place to Go* [30] and *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk* [31]), Elkind graphically describes the social, academic, and psychological pressures that contemporary American children experience. They are pushed too quickly into adult-like attitudes and behaviors, so that inner strengths and controls are prevented from stabilizing gradually during the growing-up years. Turning half-formed youngsters into assertive adolescents filled with bravado but lacking in the empathic bonds that assist in helping them build their own place in their high schools, colleges, and communities feeds the growing statistics on delinquency each year and fills penitentiaries with teen children. The result is young adults who cannot learn, who cannot form cooperative social relationships, and who sometimes cannot even see reasons for continuing to live. Slick phrases, designer dresses, and outwardly sophisticated social skills shielding an inner emptiness and ache: such is the picture many American children present today.

Elkind's insightful characterizations have been extended by many oth-

ers, especially Neil Postman (56), Valerie Suransky (70), and Marie Winn (82). All explore the multiple pressures on parents that contribute to their pushing children precipitously into educational undertakings and social situations well beyond their coping capacities. A recent *Phi Delta Kappan* cartoon ironically illustrated this phenomenon—a father leaning over the cribside says to the sleeping infant, "Wake up! Time to get started on your SAT lesson!" Much less amusing are anecdotes of young children so overstressed that coping becomes impossible. In this regard, I always remember Carl, a thin four-year-old referred for play therapy by the hospital where he was treated when he tried to hang himself. Living with his 20-year-old mother and her boyfriend, isolated from children his own age, and expected to accompany the adolescent-adults in his world into all their social gatherings, showing a degree of self-control far beyond his capacities, Carl decided he "just couldn't do it any more." So, like the cowboy in the thriller he had seen the night before, he tied a cord around his neck and over the closet door. The bruises that resulted disappeared over the next weeks; the emotional bruises, however, from years of unmet childhood needs, remained through months of treatment and counseling with the family.

Adolescent parents who are so preoccupied with their own maturing and its complex demands, working parents struggling to balance the demands of children with personal and professional agendas, competitive parents who see the outline of the college acceptance/rejection in the first school reports on a child's progress, anxious older first-time parents who worry about each indication of difficulty their growing child shows to such a degree that the child learns to inhibit signals of need or distress—all these parent stresses and many more are described by teachers of the young today. From their individual contacts with children, teachers validate the growing number of self-destructive acts that indicate that the threshold for coping has been passed. Each year child and adolescent suicides continue to rise.

The pressures that children experience at home may be compounded by the early childhood settings where they may spend a significant portion of their early years. Expectations beyond the developmental capabilities of the young child to play independently, to verbalize rather than act, to listen and follow complicated teacher-directions, to function in extended group learning situations like hearing several stories in a row or child-by-child sharing sessions that involve much waiting and watching—all these are inappropriate for the young child who best learns when engaged in hands-on sensory experiences accompanied with opportunities for questioning and discussing with adults. Active play with people, objects, and ideas is the learning medium of the young child, but many programs are neglecting this vehicle for learning in their rush to "prove"

that the child is well prepared for "the big school," that is, entrance into primary education. Thus the dittos, workbooks, and drill routines that are sometimes so overwhelming to the primary child are filtering into kindergartens and preschools.

Elkind's latest work examines this phenomenon, decrying the "miseducation" of the young with vivid accounts of the signs of stress in academically pressured children and in their teachers who find that their knowledge of child development and the learning process in the early years conflicts with cultural expectations for early skill attainment (31).

Affirming this perception of teacher pressure as well as child pressure in early childhood settings, Nancy Curry visited varied early childhood programs and then queried, "Where have all the players gone?" as she surveyed the content-oriented, teacher-directed activities of many settings. Emphasizing the dynamic connection between active, imaginative sociodramatic play and optimal cognitive and social-emotional growth, Curry urges teachers to resist the pressures to abandon the block corners, easels, puppets, and role-playing materials that have historically characterized quality early education (21). Rather, teachers most effectively stimulate learning and aid developmental growth when they sensitively interact with children through the use of play materials in a well-prepared environment. As Sarah Smilansky has shown in her work with the young, this is particularly important for disadvantaged children whose capacity for spontaneous and imaginative sociodramatic play may be diminished and whose social bonds with adults may be tenuous (68).

The three children described at length in this monograph all evidence severe inability to sustain play and social interactions with their peers, much like Smilansky's preschoolers. Play interventions with solemn-eyed, nonresponsive "watchers" is as crucial as appropriate play strategies with the "off-the-wall" livewire who flits from area to area, person to person, frenetically seeking to secure that which is not yet secure inside, that sense of self that makes goal-directed activity possible. Charles Wolfgang emphasizes how either extreme of behavior signals children desperately in need of adult intervention before they can become productive, prosocial members of a preschool or kindergarten (83).

The remainder of this monograph explores the histories and current behaviors of three such nonplaying young children, all of whom have been marked by the stress factors discussed in this chapter and all of whom lack, in varying degrees, the prerequisites for academic success vital for the child in formal educational settings.

3. THE PREREQUISITES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

As Chapter 2 emphasizes, children—and even the phenomenon of childhood itself—are increasingly endangered today. We see children in the early years who cannot play and learn, children in the later elementary years who are tuning out and turning away from both the opportunities and the challenges schools offer, adolescents who rush into the dead ends of drugs, alcohol, easy "street money," or "having a baby to love" when not yet able to care for their own well-being. I would maintain that these behaviors of our children are our burdens, our responsibility. We as members of families and a society, have not provided the *conditions for building the prerequisites for academic success* in the formative early years. Without such a foundation, children are ill prepared for the challenges of formal schooling. They can make little use—sometimes none at all—of the challenges posed in the "big school."

The prerequisites that we must ensure are provided in the early years are fourfold:

- Adequate physical care, nutrition, and health care accompanied by medical treatment when necessary.
- Enduring social relationships, beginning with the biological family and extending through the larger family system to the social world and its institutions (schools, community and social organizations, religious and political groups, etc.).
- Opportunities to interact with responsive environments that provide age-appropriate play/learning activities and caring adults who organize things to do, words to use, and activities that build thinking and goal-directed actions.
- Establishment of a secure inner sense of individuality and self-worth, building the inner conviction that "I'm a curious, capable, cooperative child who has a valued place in family, school, and society."

The identification of these prerequisites is not new. Knowledge about the essentials for healthy and full growth has been articulated since the science of child development began amassing information at the beginning of this century. But like most of the truisms that underpin our lives, we must reidentify and re-articulate the MUSTS of child development when we see so many children growing up without the prerequisites for whole and healthy growth.

To see what occurs when these prerequisites are not adequately provided in the early years, let us look into the lives of three young Pittsburgh children. The conditions that have put their development at risk and the challenges they present in their early childhood classrooms convey the damage that can be done when parents, community, and society cannot provide adequate growth support during the first years of life.

4. THREE CHILDREN OF THE EIGHTIES

More and more young children are appearing in classrooms with deficiencies in overall development. They are underprepared for the tasks and demands of the formal school environment, most often not because they have had poor educational experiences in preschool or kindergarten but because the developmental difficulties have been so pronounced that the teacher alone cannot fill the gaps in the needful child who so concerns her/him. Looking to the family, the teacher sees parent(s) beset by stresses so potent that nurturing the child's growing mind and body is often put aside in order to meet simple survival needs.

Yet children and their families and teachers do not give up the struggle to grow. Tenaciously they strive for developmental progress as completely as circumstances permit. This chapter peers with empathy and appreciation into the lives of three boys growing up in the pocketed hillside communities of Pittsburgh. I have chosen these three from among the large numbers like them in the early childhood programs in Pittsburgh because I think their circumstances, their signals of stress and difficulty, and their potentials for growth represent the range of children I have observed in the centers of western Pennsylvania. Additionally, their early childhood programs are also representative of the dynamic changes on the grassroots level today as child care and preschool programs adapt to the phenomena of unemployment, family separation or dissolution, mobility, parental anxiety or inability to parent effectively, and the myriad of other problems impacting families and their young children. While the boys' names have been changed to protect their anonymity, as much descriptive detail as possible has been included to provide fully colored portraits of children and families living in situations of stress. Through accounts provided by family members and teachers of these young boys, readers will come to feel the gravity of the situation for these at-risk children who enter primary classrooms without all necessary prerequisites for academic success.

PETEY

On a spring morning at one of the centers of the most extensive home- and center-based day-care program in western Pennsylvania, small groups of children are at play indoors with blocks, art materials, socio-dramatic role play, and puzzles. In the adjoining play yard tricycles, a large hillside climbing structure, and a table full of manipulative toys also engross fluid groups of three- to five-year-olds. In the midst of all the activity one child runs, darts, and jumps with a basketball clenched tightly in his arms. His light round cheeks are flushed pink, and sweat covers the forehead showing under his brown flopping bangs. The head teacher calls out to him, "Come on, Petey, let's shoot hoops." His bright flashing dark eyes focus on her. "Yahhh!" he cries, springing from his crouched position on the side of the hill and running full force to the hoop on the edge of the cement area adjoining the building. "I got it, I got it," he shouts as he throws the ball at the hoop while in mid-running stride. It bounces off the ring. "Offfhh!" he exclaims as he runs to retrieve it, pushing David aside and nearly toppling him. David objects, first to Petey and then to the teacher arriving at the hoop. For the next ten minutes the teacher sensitively mediates between the two boys, repeatedly establishing a routine where one shoots and the other rebounds the usually missed shot. David—who, like Petey, is nearly five—stands a head taller and copes well with the give-and-take of this "game." Petey, however, is constantly unable to restrain his desire to keep the ball and game as his own. He jumps in front of David as he tries to shoot, pulling the ball away and running across the yard with it. At the teacher's calm insistence, he returns to the game but runs to the basket, taking a shot rather than handing the ball to David. Then he tussles with David over the rebound. The teacher steps in, physically restraining this pulsating body of competitive energy. Her hands and words and eye contact at his eye level work. Just for this minute, he appears to be self-contained and calm. He stands at the line, waiting for David to shoot again and then rebounds. He takes his turn and, now even smiling, watches David reach the ball that he has just succeeded in getting through the hoop. But two turns later he angrily shoves at David, then screams a series of street-word insults as David tenaciously holds onto his side of the ball, insisting it's *his* turn now, not Petey's. Again the teacher intervenes.

Petey's basketball behavior might at first appear to be just the extreme reaction of a little boy who "can't share" or an overly competitive child who wants to "win no matter what." But observing this child for a full day of care gives ample evidence of his inadequately developed social skills and overstressed emotional equilibrium, interfering with each rou-

tine activity in the day-care day. The family-style eating times are interrupted with Petey's hoarding of food and aggressive lashing-out at other children who try to talk with the teacher at the table. In the group's reading/singing period, Petey rolls out of the circle, races to his cubby and curls inside it. Returning to the circle with the aide who has quickly walked after him, he sits for half a minute beside her. Then he turns to his best buddy and whacks him on the back, saying, "Hey, get me, Matt!" Now contained on the aide's lap, he eyes the teacher continuing to read and smiles at her. For nearly a minute his full gaze rests on her face, taking in the expression of the story she is telling so enthusiastically. Then he breaks off, shouting to Matt, "Hey, I've got a boat like that. I took it on the river!"

Whether in individual, small-group, or whole-group activities, Petey shows awareness of only his own needs and appears driven with an intense awareness that he must "get" what he needs at all costs. Playing, eating, talking, even naptime, are experiences where Petey desperately demands to "get enough," whether it is sufficient food, opportunity to use playthings, or soothing words and backrubs on his cot. "Me, me, me!" his behavior clamors. Other children show mutual concern, the excitement of playing together, empathy at another's hurt or disappointment. Petey, however, never slows from his pace of grabbing the toy his eye focuses on or pulling the pitcher or plate from across the table. His head teacher and her staff have learned that they must be constantly vigilant, establishing the boundaries and controls for Petey's impulses. As they do so, they explain and reassure him that they will provide and assist him in managing. Petey's head teacher, the social worker who meets with his mother, and the staff at the child-care program all know that their efforts will take intensive, long-term, and grueling minute-to-minute work in order to assist this child in becoming a socialized human personality.

How has a child as young as Petey developed so much difficulty? Discussion with his mother, his teacher, and the agency's social worker provides a picture of his disjointed, deprived developmental history and his currently stressed social world.

Petey is the third son of parents who have had a history of drug involvement. He was born soon after his mother began serving a sentence in a federal penitentiary for drug sales. Like many children of drug-abusing parents, he was born with physical defects. He had a facial disfigurement and a cleft palate, both of which were surgically repaired in the months after his birth when he was placed in foster care. Later he was placed in the care of a relative in his mother's extended family, and he continued living in this family setting for about three years. During this time his mother attended classes and counseling while in prison. In her

child development course, she was challenged to think about her own history and the lives of her children. She says she decided at that time to try to live differently, to regain custody of her children when she left prison, and to give them a "real home." After returning to Pittsburgh, she was able to get a job and a large apartment, and then regained custody of her two older boys, both preadolescents. She did not have contact with Petey, however, until he was identified as a child abuse victim by a hospital emergency physician who treated him when he was nearly four. Since there were indications that both neglect and abuse had occurred, Petey's mother was able to regain custody after agreement to work with child welfare and day-care services for the child's protection and family supervision. Petey was enrolled in day care soon after.

In his first days in care Petey evidenced severely delayed or distorted development. From the moment he entered with his mother in the morning, his expressions of anger were regular, intense, and quite unpredictable. Although he had been with his mother for some weeks, he refused to call her Mom, instead using her first name and insisting to his teachers that she was not his "real mom." Nor did he address teachers by their names, often using street-talk expletives when angry at them, and telling them he hated coming to "their dumb school." He rarely made direct eye contact, spoke in short, demanding sentences, and rejected other children's play and verbal overtures. He furiously refused participation in the short group discussion, reading and singing times during the day. At mealtimes he hoarded piles of food on his plate and jammed large spoonfuls or handfuls into his mouth, several times to the point of choking. He often struck out physically at other children, who quickly labeled him as "bad" and "mean" and refused to interact with him without an adult present. He tried to maintain an exterior of invulnerability, challenging other children and adults with taunts and dares, and responding to another child's hurt—whether by his hands or by accident—with comments like "Ha-ha, got you!" and sometimes further attacks. Staff found that containing him in the classroom meant one skilled teacher available to him at all times; the head teacher made a special effort to use her body, words, and eye contact to try to penetrate the "tough guy shell" surrounding this angry little boy. At the same time the center's social work staff worked with his mother in order to set stable but not hostile or angry limit-setting techniques at home.

For the next two months, intervention at school and at home showed little progress with Petey. Without an adult presence to establish physical and social boundaries, he was impulsive, aggressive, and provocative with other children. He often injured himself by running into objects and other children, by jumping and falling, and by hurling at walls objects that ricocheted. Plans began to be explored for referral to a thera-

peutic nursery.

At the same time, however, there were signs of progress. Petey began to bring objects from home for the head teacher "to see"; he began to turn to her for help and to seek her out with his large brown eyes. In addition to the aggressive "hit'n'run" relationship he had established with the two largest boys in the class, he also began to follow the oldest girl in the group, a very soft-moving and verbal heavyset five-year-old. In play she seemed protective and deferential to him, and he was able to sustain play with her for longer and longer periods. As his outbursts became less frequent, he often used the words he had been hearing from the teachers to negotiate with other children, starting to express his wishes and feelings rather than acting them out.

Slowly, Petey was learning to become a member of a human community, at school and at home simultaneously. He came to depend on his teacher, asking, "You sure she's OK?" when she was not there and showing increased agitation, anger, and sadness until she returned. Finally, one day after a confrontation with another child, he cried for the first time. Then he allowed his teacher to comfort him and help him to cope. It had taken four months for the underlying fears and pains that so tormented this child to begin to come out. He began to call to his teacher when he was in distress or anger, telling her what the trouble was. If he was fairly calm, she would verbally give him a direction or even a choice of alternatives to solve his impasse. If he was agitated or overwhelmed with anger/fear/other affects, however, she would first say, "Come here Petey, let me see you up close." Eye, body, and verbal contact all helped to secure him in the midst of his tumult of emotions.

As Petey began to make progress, he became more fluent. He started to use words to communicate ideas and to plan play themes, not just to assert power like quick blows toward someone else. Additionally, he became able to verbalize awareness of causes and consequences, associating past with present and possible futures in a more age-appropriate way. Although his play continued to be primarily motoric and was still choppy, he could sometimes take others' play ideas and join in physical/verbal interactions. Socially and cognitively, Petey was starting to exhibit more behaviors typical of the preschool child.

At home, too, Petey was showing signs of progress. His mother found it easier to care for him, and she realized that his "running" in the streets with his older brothers in the evenings overstimulated him. He now called her "Mom" and sometimes enjoyed her talking or reading to him at night; he especially liked to curl close with her and watch "stories" on the VCR before bed. The older boys—who had been with her for half a year longer than Petey—began to challenge her, staying out late and not attending school. Petey brought tales to school of "big

fights'' at home—he was no longer the center—and the social work staff assisted the mother in trying to stabilize the home situation. Staff were particularly concerned because Petey came to school several times with injuries from ''fooling around'' with his brothers.

Chronologically Petey was just ''ready'' to attend public school kindergarten in his neighborhood in September 1988. He had been in day care for nine months and had made some degree of progress. Yet his ability to verbalize rather than act out his impulses, to trust and turn to his teachers for assistance, and to work in an independent and goal-directed manner were still severely limited. Additionally, his mother's employer was talking of transferring her to another site, which might necessitate a family move to a new part of the city. And over the summer months, while Petey continued in care, his brothers continued to present strong challenges to their mother's authority while they were out of school, usually unsupervised.

The developmental stresses Petey has experienced still contribute to his at-risk categorization. Physically he is the smallest in his age group. His physical and verbal aggressive outbursts have decreased but continue to occur; now they tend to alternate with the crying and tantrums more typical of the two-year-old than the nearly six-year-old. And while Petey is more able to accept and sometimes even rely upon the limits set by his teachers, he does not consistently show the capacity for self-control and regulation that makes truly independent functioning possible. His progress in his classroom must be carefully monitored this year.

In reviewing Petey's short life, the multiple impacting forces of poverty, social disorganization, deprivation and abuse, and inadequately developed human bonds have all contributed to the portrait of ''the livewire little tough guy'' who took such a hostile stance in his first days of day care. Years of unmet needs resulted in a stance of ''not needing nobody,'' a facade of self-sufficiency, as well as cognitive and emotional inflexibility that made functioning in a classroom nearly impossible for this young child. Only with the careful and concerted efforts of highly insightful professionals did Petey begin to fill the gaps of his incompleted early childhood and start to establish some of the prerequisites that must be firmly in place before independent academic achievement will be possible. How much progress will Petey be able to make? A great deal depends on the family and school environments in his future. Perhaps these will provide him with the structure, stability, and skill-building opportunities that will continue to make progress possible. But perhaps the fast-action fixes so accessible on the streets and sometimes in the schools—the drugs, the social dares, the pressures for money or physical power ''however you can get it''—will prove pathways too enticing for Petey to resist.

SEAN

Although Sean is also a nearly five-year-old boy growing up in the stressed area of western Pennsylvania with its high unemployment, crime, and mobility, his behavior at school and his ecological circumstances contrast those of Petey in almost every way. Petey's high energy and impulsive behaviors immediately stand out in his classroom and on the playground. His shouts, threats, and attacks demand the teacher's active intervention constantly. Sean, in contrast, may remain unnoticed to anyone except the acutely trained observer of young children for he shadows, circles, and watches the activities of his preschool peers with only rare active participation. He speaks hesitantly, lisping and forming full sentences with difficulty, and his voice has a singsong younger-years lilt. He often echoes parts of others' communications, as if he were practicing making the words on his own. In play and group activities Sean is always the third, fourth, or last to attempt a task, never asserting the ideas or desires that seem to churn inside the wide, crystal-clear blue eyes that peer out from under the thatch of long blondish hair.

Like Petey, Sean's family has split apart and tried to unite again during his early years, and he too is growing up in a socially and economically stressed community. Yet the outward signs of his ecological strains are much more subdued, for Sean is a third-generation son of a dying steel suburb of Pittsburgh. Both his father and grandfather worked in the Clairton Mills, the primary employer in his community. Wages were high, and families tended to rear their children with the expectation that sons would enter the Clairton works while daughters married boys of the community. In the 1970s the Clairton Works was the largest producer of industrial coke in the United States, and the plant paid 60 percent of the borough's municipal and school taxes. The declining steel industry has devastated Clairton and many similar communities in the Pittsburgh area, however. From 1979 to 1980 the employment dropped from 5,000 to 1,600. By 1980 almost 20 percent of Clairton's population was below poverty level in contrast to the Allegheny County average of 9.2 percent. The present unemployment rate remains at over 11 percent, and the 1980s saw year-by-year reductions in social services. Revenues to borough and school districts fell from $192,131 in 1983 to $158,000 in 1986. Declaring the school system "economically distressed," the state secretary of education assumed responsibility for the schools for a period in the mid-eighties, although local control and funding have now been reestablished. Most borough services have been eliminated. No police or fire protection is now provided. State police officers try to provide protection and curb the rising crime/drug trafficking activities in the borough. Adjacent boroughs answer the fire calls that regularly occur.

A drive through the borough shows the social signs of a community in disarray. Boarded-up homes, for sale signs, and buildings in disrepair pocket the area. Young families who are able relocate, often leaving empty a home that has housed three generations. Families who have not been able to make a transition to new employment and a new community—like Sean's—attempt to cope. Sean is a child of what Michael Harrington has called "the new American poverty" (40). In his study of the increasingly poor in the United States in the eighties, Harrington notes the number of steel communities in the Pittsburgh area where unemployment or underemployment results in "skidding," in a family's fall down the economic slope, coming nearer and nearer to the poverty level as the mills slowly die, as other employment decreases or exists only sporadically, and as child-rearing and family expenses escalate. Sean, his family, his community, and his preschool are exactly representative of Harrington's apt description.

Sean is the fourth child, the youngest of an extended family system still headed by the grandparents who settled in western Pennsylvania as immigrants in search of economic stability at the beginning of this century. Both Sean's father and grandfather worked in the mills in the Mon Valley. But Sean's father's employment has been sporadic prior to the boy's birth and since, and for the past three years he has been called back to the mills only twice. In order to maintain the family, his mother wanted to return to work a decade ago. This contradicted the family's perception of her role, and stress between the parents and within the family has been marked. Since Sean's birth his mother has worked in an office regularly. Sean has been cared for by members of his extended family, and twice he and his siblings have moved out with his mother when tensions between the parents rose to violence. Each time his mother and the children have returned "home" after stays with relatives. His father currently cares for Sean and the older children while his mother works, except when he is following up possible job leads. Then relatives help to get Sean to preschool and the older ones off to the public schools (which they attend regularly, making average to below-average progress).

In 1986 private funding opened the Mon Valley Center for Unemployed Families, a multipurpose agency operated under the administration of Arsenal Family and Children's Center in Pittsburgh. As a part of the broad services offered to families under economic and social stress, the program operates a preschool program for 65 two- to five-year-olds in a community church. Sean began attending this program at no charge in the fall of 1987; observations of his progress were made in the following spring and summer prior to his entrance in public school.

As noted earlier, Sean's behavior in his classroom was as nonassertive, passive, dependent, and tentative as Petey's was aggressive, overactive,

aggressively independent ("don't need nobody"), and domineering. Yet the boys showed some deeper similiarities. Like Petey, Sean found words difficult to locate, hard to string together, especially when his hands and mind so obviously wanted to join in the play activities with the other children. For example, he stood on the side of the block building/vehicles area intensely watching three other boys constructing and driving through the maze on the floor. He picked up a truck from the shelf, held it out, and stuttered, "I, ah, I do it, I b-b-bing it over ..." to Dante, trying to find a way into the "delivery" episode the boys were enacting. The teacher moved into the area and gently suggested a role for Sean in the play, following up on his attempt when the other boys did not respond to his soft, choppy words. "Yeah, sure," they responded. For several minutes Sean drove along with the other three. But as the play began to evolve into a crash/ambulance/doctor episode he once again slipped back to his watcher stance as the other boys planned, argued, and finally enacted a new play sequence. Like Petey, Sean appeared unable to fully initiate and sustain play sequences with his peers, unable to give full expression to his ideas and enact them with others, unable to be a productive and prosocial member of the classroom.

Also like Petey, Sean's level of skill in the art, music, and story times of the classroom showed his delayed development. Videotaped one sunny summer morning in the outdoor area, Sean and several other children were busy with watercolors on a grassy hillside. The children had been talking about boats they had seen down on the river, and Sean produced several papers that he called boats, each painted only with vertical lines. His art was still the process orientation of a two- to three-year-old, covering the picture with stroke upon stroke of the paintbrush and just starting to control and "make" with it. A half hour later a group had evolved a "train-and-ticket" play sequence, each child cutting and marking red paper "tickets" for journeys. Sean shadowed the play, at times sitting in the train, and finally took scissors and paper. Holding the scissors with thumb and first finger, awkwardly and choppily slicing at the sheet of paper, perseveringly he cut long strip after long strip, remarking to his teacher that these were his tickets, but not marking them. By the time he had finished the task, the other children had taken their tickets and game to the tricycles on the pavement where Dante was functioning as "cop" and collecting—rather than handing out—tickets. Sean gathered his strips in hand and moved down the hill, shadowing the riders until the teacher invited him to ask for a turn. Soon he was riding, strips still clenched in his hand as he watched the others give and take.

At the singing, story, and discussion times during the preschool day Sean would quietly sit in the group, his large blue eyes circling from child to teacher as others talked, sang, and moved. With the teacher's

active encouragement and/or assistance. Sean would add to the discussion. He sometimes sang familiar songs quietly, often mouthing the words, and often moved his body in response to the rhythms of other voices. He seemed to take in stories but never requested specific ones. Even after eight months, the teacher noted that he never spontaneously went to the comfortable book corner of the room and examined the variety of picture books and storybooks displayed there.

What Sean did—so like Petey—was use his body to express his needs and signal his wishes. Teachers responded to his cues, providing empathic words and suggestions of behaviors for "how to do" or "how to join in" as a member of the group. But without such adult support and assistance, Sean dangled on the edges, a "quiet child," at risk of disappearing through the cracks in a large active group of children.

What are the factors that contribute to such a picture of passivity? How has Sean developed such a shadow persona?

Much evidence has been provided that infants, even in the first days of life, exhibit basic temperaments. Sean had been typical of the "quiet" picture Brazelton describes: sleeping for extended periods, crying quietly, watchful but not overtly responsive, generally subdued and just "easy" to have at home (4). But a quiet child in a family of many other children, in a home where parents are economically stressed and emotionally at odds, in an extended family where people appear and disappear unpredictably—such a child may have difficulty finding his place in his world and developing the skills to make his place known and valued to others. So it was then that Sean slowly grew in his early years, learning to use his body but with caution, learning to use words but with hesitancy and reserve, learning information about his world but only in piecemeal fashion. The delayed pattern of social, cognitive, and physical growth is a grave concern as Sean's parents and teachers think about his movement into the public school. There, under the economic pressures typical of a distressed area, kindergarten groups are large and operate on only a half-day basis. Work tends to be done in a group, emphasizing verbal and written performance; no transitional or readiness groupings exist for children like Sean who are at risk for being developmentally unprepared for meeting early academic expectations. Will he flounder in his first formal school experiences? Will the eager watchfulness he now uses to try to find his place and build his skills begin to wither? Will he become one of the dropouts, convinced he "can't" learn what seems to come so easily to his classmates? In 1985 and 1986 the first statewide testing was done to identify children in need of remediation. In both those years Clairton ranked highest in Allegheny County for numbers of children in need. Without appropriate developmental intervention, Sean appears likely to join them.

JEREMY

Surface impressions of Jeremy and his classroom might lead an observer to hesitate to label such a child "at risk." He is a well-endowed and coordinated boy of five, attending a nursery-kindergarten program in a private school in one of Pittsburgh's affluent neighborhoods. Although he plays and interacts with peers well, teachers note he has difficulty permitting others to take a leading role or to reject his ideas. Then he may shout or stomp away but will return shortly and vie again for a leadership position. His verbal skills are advanced and he has progressed in early phonics work as well as single digit computation.

Yet both his mother and teachers have grave concerns about Jeremy. After speaking to a parent-teacher meeting at this school, I was contacted by the mother for consultation about her son. She felt he was angry at others and that he expressed self-destructive wishes, saying things like, "I just don't want to have to DO it any more!" in a tone of disheartenment that worried her deeply. After talking with the school, I scheduled classroom observations and individual sessions with Jeremy.

In his kindergarten Jeremy was active and eager in self-directed activities. He was also very responsive to his teachers and peers in the flowing rhythm of the classroom with its opportunities for play, small-group activities, outdoor time, singing, and group discussion, special periods of art/music/language/physical education, and meals during the full-day schedule.

Yet during the day when Jeremy had to focus on independent activity, completion of tasks with objects or paper and pencil, or when teachers asked him to perform tasks with them individually or in front of peers, his free-wheeling energetic demeanor was transformed. He would physically turn away from the task or his teachers, often saying something like, "Nuhh, that's no fun ..." or he would move to the pencil sharpener or an interest cubicle where playthings were displayed, a friend's desk or the bathroom in the corner of the room. When redirected to his work, he shifted anxiously in his seat, his gaze circling the room or focusing on friends' activities. He pulled at the long "tail" of his mod hairstyle or gnawed his fingers and pencil. Wiggling in his seat, he called out for assistance. Given direction and encouragement by his concerned teacher, he bent back over his work but two minutes later shifted away again. Right hand jiggling in his pocket, he removed a small object that he hefted into the air, hitting a boy several seats ahead. "Hey!" And an uproar began. Independent functioning did not appear possible for this little boy. Why? A review of his developmental history and current life situation reveals the prototypical picture of what Elkind has aptly labeled the "hurried child" (29).

Jeremy was born less that a year after his parents' marriage. Both his parents grew up in a small ethnic community nestled in Pittsburgh's hills, which, like Clairton, has had a steel-industry economic base. His father had been married for a short period of time following high school and then divorced, and had met Jeremy's mother soon afterward. He worked days attempting to build his own remodeling business and at nights as a musician. Jeremy's mother is five years younger than her husband. She had been an excellent student in high school, but her working-class family viewed higher education as "boys' business," so she moved into an office position in banking after graduation. Her capabilities were soon affirmed, however, and she was promoted. Her employers encouraged her to begin a business management program at a local college where she won a scholarship for evening studies. She began this program at the same time as her marriage. For the next several years she combined working with going to school and becoming a mother.

Jeremy was an unplanned child, and his mother worried about the costs of raising a child in the economic instability of her community and her husband's struggling business ventures. Although her family criticized her decision to return to work three months after Jeremy's birth, members of the extended network did provide child care. Her husband also participated in caring for Jeremy. At three Jeremy began a half-day nursery and spent afternoons at the homes of various relatives. At four he attended a neighborhood day-care center and began gymnastics and karate lessons, each class taking one evening a week. His mother became more conscious about her high educational hopes for her son, seeing in him the potential for making early steps that had not been possible for herself and her husband. She placed him in a private nursery/kindergarten program, stating that this would provide the best preparation for entrance into one of the private elementary schools where admission was limited and highly competitive. His father expressed his sense that she was pushing too hard, both for Jeremy and for herself as she made progress in her university work and in her profession. His employment continued to fluctuate erratically.

Jeremy currently attends the kindergarten class from 8:00 until 3:00 daily, then he moves to the after-school program for children of working parents until 5:30 or 6:00 when his mother or father picks him up. He now takes karate lessons three times a week in the evenings, and he spends part of the weekend at the local boys' club where he takes swimming lessons and plays on two competitive teams.

His father disagrees with his mother's educational aspirations for Jeremy, saying boys from his area do not "need all that academic hype." His father initiated the karate lessons so that "Jeremy can take care of himself"; he and his son engage in a great many physical activities and

mock fighting. His father is demanding of Jeremy's behavior: quiet in the house, neat with playthings, prompt when requested to do something. His mother and father have often argued about these demands, the mother stating that he is harsh. She tends to be quite permissive and voices worry and guilt about her unavailability to her son. Her most recent promotion has meant some out-of-town traveling. Following this promotion, family tensions were so heightened that his mother and Jeremy went to live with the maternal parents for some weeks. Recently his mother's mother has separated from her husband who has been out of work on disability leave and drinking heavily. This has added stress to Jeremy's family since his grandmother has been his primary out-of-home caregiver since his birth. His mother cites her college psychology courses as supporting her concerns about Jeremy's development; his father says, "She's just overdoing it again."

Jeremy began individual play sessions with me with an aggressively mature stance. Rather than moving to use the available playthings, he sat on the couch and engaged me in conversation, asking me questions and telling me about his likes, friends, activities—but little, until I gently probed, about his family. When we finally moved to use the toys, at my suggestion after long minutes of "stuck" silence, he built "big forts," emphasizing how strong he could make them. He disdained the play cars nearby, telling me about the skills he would use when he drove real cars someday. In drawing he portrayed activities where he was dominant, powerful, the center of the action. In his first picture, for example, which he titled "Fighting with Danny up the wall," he drew himself toppling his friend over the edge with his "big sword." This was followed by a picture of him skiing competently down the middle of a slope while his father and mother remained stuck at the top on opposite sides of the mountains drawn up each edge of the paper. This was followed with a "winning at laser tag" and then a picture of him running far ahead of the other runners from the boys' club team.

The stance of mature, competent, self-reliant, "grown-up" little boy was marked throughout the play sessions. I was strongly reminded of what Rex Speers (69) has called the "pseudomature syndrome," the child who has had to learn to parent himself rather than progressively developing independence from the dependency inherent in the young child-authoritative parent relationship. And I thought of the brittle children described by David Elkind, pushed into adult-like stances and actions so early in life (29).

Before the play sessions ended, I presented Jeremy with my sense that while he was capable and competent, he also must feel unsure and pressured at times, that everyone feels that way sometimes. I cited his mother's concern and her report that he talked about killing himself. He

slumped on the couch, his affect dramatically changed, but no words came. Finally, after several minutes, he said he would like to draw another picture. The "maze" he produced with no beginning, no end, and no way out, appears in Figure 1. In producing this picture, he showed concentrated, laborious care. When finished, he brought it to me and began to talk about how he tried to get through the maze, taking *my* finger and moving me through the "routes" that always ended in blockages, walls, dead ends. "Just can't get out, just never get out," he said. We then talked about the feelings of pressure, of being "stuck," of being overwhelmed with no one to turn to. Jeremy began to speak as the little boy he was, not the big man he felt he had to be.

In subsequent conferences with his parents and teachers, I urged the family to decrease the additional activities and academic pressures as much as possible while affirming their efforts at home and school to set consistent, developmentally appropriate expectations for him. His mother and father listened to teachers describe the techniques that had worked best at school, and they appeared to understand the necessity for working together in setting standards of behavior at home.

Subsequent followup six months later showed the family situation stable although underlying stresses were much the same. Jeremy's progress at school was validated by his teacher's reports, which noted improvement but also showed continuing difficulty in functioning independently. And while the number of outside activities had decreased, teachers still expressed concern that Jeremy always seemed "pushed, pushed, pushed," and tense. As the springtime period of testing/placement in private school neared, his tension-showing behaviors increased. Is this the establishment of a pattern of always having to "measure up" yet never feeling adequate about doing so? Will whole, secure growth for Jeremy be possible? Or will the stresses that have impacted so strongly on the boy and his family take a toll, fragmenting Jeremy's development that is so advanced in some respects yet so delayed in others? Will meeting the challenges of later school years and adolescence be possible? Only the next decade will provide the answer about whether the stresses of growing up young and pressured will result in personality fractures in tomorrow's school and social worlds. The risks are grave.

Figure 1
Jeremy's Maze
(25% reduction of original)

CONCLUSION

These vignettes of three children's lives have provided glimpses of the changing face of childhood in the last quarter of the twentieth century, a time when growing numbers of children in affluent America are being scarred by poverty, social/economic stress, family instability, changing parental and social roles, and increased anxiety about academic achievement earlier and earlier in children's lives. None of the three boys highlighted in this chapter has become so deviant in his development that he reaches the doorways of primary grade education in need of isolation from the mainstream, placement in a special education setting. Yet *each* evidences deviation that makes his ability to function as an independent, competent learner in a large group most difficult—*at times impossible*. Each child, to varying degrees, has not been provided with the prerequisites that make active learning and responsive, responsible classroom activity possible. The fact that each child has made developmental progress is in large part attributable to the efforts of the early childhood programs that serve these children and their families. Each of these programs has adapted new strategies of service to populations of citizens in need over the past decade in order to respond to the changing ecology of young children and their families.

The next chapter examines some of the adaptive strengths that exist in the splintered world of early education today; it concludes with proposals for making this important component of support for young children and their families stronger as the numbers of children in need continue to grow.

5. THE SPLINTERED WORLD OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Analysis of the history of early childhood education in this country provides a clear explanation of the kaleidoscopic and splintered reality that characterizes programs for young children and their families today. That history is composed of separate strands of kindergarten movement, child care (or "day nurseries" as they were known earlier in the century), nursery education, parent-child cooperative education, specialized approaches to education of the young like the variety of Montessori programs, and forms of early intervention for young children with special needs. Only rarely have these services dynamically interrelated even though they are targeted to the same age population. And in eras when funding has been limited, competition and even hostility between these strands have sometimes emerged.

As an educator preparing undergraduates to enter the field of early education, I have emphasized the diverse threads in this history so that beginning early educators will be well prepared for the dynamic growth and change taking place in the field today. I emphasize the need for them—as the new generation of professionals—to form linkages between the strands of the profession so that those who work with the young can speak with a unified voice for those too young to articulate their needs themselves.

Throughout the twentieth century early educators have tried to be responsive to changing social needs. This commitment has lead to the design of programs that provide initial educational experiences for young children appropriate to their developmental growth and—at the same time—meet external social demands such as the need of working parents for full-day service or the need of disadvantaged families for resources to use at home with their young. In the early decades of the century, nursery education gained prominence. In the thirties and forties social need resulted in child care emphasis. In the sixties early intervention through initiation of various models of Head Start began, surviving to the present and showing impressive results even though this program currently is able to serve only 16 percent of eligible families. And in the seventies and eighties demands for multiple types of service have resulted in a patchwork of child care, preschool, parent-child classes, and many more forms of early childhood education in every community across the country. It is rare that a child begins primary grade education without some form of early education experience.

The programs that served Petey, Sean, and Jeremy are representative of the strengths and also the stresses within the field of early childhood. Each program was developed decades ago, and since then has adapted new service strategies to assist the social and educational needs of specific groups of young children. Louise Child Care provides center- and home-based care for over 3,000 children in Allegheny County. With a staff of teachers, social service workers, and child development consultants, and with a funding stream that combines public monies with private grants and United Way contributions, the agency is better able to accommodate at-risk young than most child-care programs. Yet the strain on classroom dynamics and teaching staff is pronounced each time such a child begins care. In 1989 the agency opened a center solely for "female offenders," women who, like Petey's mother, have been imprisoned and are returning to the community and trying to reconstruct their lives. Education and intervention with each child will be individualized; group size will be limited; and linkages to other family support services will be extensive. Thus the kind of intervention that was accomplished with Petey may be possible to extend to a larger population of children in need.

The Mon Valley Center for Unemployed Families is another new addition to an established early childhood program, an extension of the Arsenal Family and Children's Center founded in 1953 by Margaret McFarland, Erik Erikson, and Benjamin Spock for nursery education and teacher training. Today, utilizing funding of numerous private Pittsburgh foundations—particularly the Howard Heinz Endowment—that have responded to the dire straits of the Clairton situation, the program provides food, clothing, social services, teen intervention, parent education (especially for adolescent single mothers), job referral, and a variety of social components, as well as an early education component. In 1989 the programs were unified under one name: Arsenal Family and Children's Comprehensive Centers.

Jeremy's experience, too, comes within an already-established system that has recently adapted to the changing needs of young families with children. His school, like many other private and public schools in Pittsburgh, has initiated classrooms for three- to four-year-olds, as well as after-school services for children of working parents whose needs go beyond the typical six-hour school day. Thus Jeremy attends an all-day kindergarten and a parent-sponsored after-school program in his private school. And in Pittsburgh, like most metropolitan centers today, all-day kindergartens and after school programs have become the rule, not the exception. Parents and administrators have worked on the community level to piece together programs to meet the widespread needs for early education, programs that provide cognitive guidance with social skill development and stable supportive emotional bonds.

Thus the strengths of the early childhood programs that our three at-risk boys attend seem significant. Each child is being educated in a setting where he is viewed as a ***developmental entity***, a unique child with a particular developmental history that brings both strengths and stresses to the classroom. The teachers view their responsibility as one of providing the guidance, modeling, and intellectual stimulation that will prepare the child for the next step in the schooling process. And, because they are well aware of the vulnerability of these at-risk young lives, they will make linkages with the staff in the "big schools" where these young ones will move.

Is this sufficient to ensure that these children will not flounder? As noted earlier, the risk factor is high.

But even more important is the reality that most of our Peteys and Seans and Jeremys are not being served in developmental programs where individualized assistance in the classroom and support to the family are possible. In a time of limited resources and decreasing national support for human needs and social services, early childhood programs are sorely pressed to accommodate the demands of young children at risk.

Today's early childhood programs are to be applauded for attempting to meet the educational and social needs of the young on the grassroots level, particularly those programs that have designed services with dedication and innovation, drawing on the best resources of the community for expertise and funding and support. Lisbeth Schorr examines some of the striking gains made by early education projects that combine education, care, and family support/involvement (62). Operating within the splintered framework of today's early childhood reality, she highlights the positive accomplishments in Head Start, child care, early intervention and preschool education. Yet she notes the drawbacks in each area: too few Head Start places, too few quality child-care programs, and too many custodial-warehousing situations; too little intervention as soon as it is needed; prohibitive costs for private nursery/preschool programs. Her warning:

> The nation's provisions for the care and education of children under five cannot long survive in their present neglected and chaotic state. New arrangements will emerge, sooner or later, from the turbulence generated by the massive social changes that have occurred so rapidly as to have outstripped the capacity of the country's institutions to respond. (62, p. 179)

The need today is for concentrated local, state, and national focus on the lives of the young, followed by a concerted effort to gather the splin-

ters of early childhood programs into one carefully crafted stained glass window of early childhood options. We have no national agenda for assisting young children's growth in the early years, no regulations to even protect their safety and well-being on a consistently applied national basis, no provisions of care and education that can ensure that the Peteys and Seans and Jeremys will enter "big school" prepared and confident. Until the splinters—as valuable and colorful and significant as some of them may be individually—are welded into a pattern of early childhood options and programs that ensure quality developmentally appropriate education to *each* young child in this country, growing up in America involves risks few other industialized nations take with the lives of the next generation.

Such change would call for a new definition of early childhood education, one that could encompass the diversity of the field. A comprehensive definition that would serve to unify the field is as follows:

> EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: The education, care, and intervention provided for children in their formative years, birth through eight, in developmentally appropriate and accredited institutions and agencies that work to (1) establish the prerequisites necessary for attainment of academic skills and (2) build the fundamental skills in the cognitive and social domains of development.

Those fundamental skills were aptly summarized by Alice Keliher, who states that rather than the limited scope "basics" that have been so stressed in the past decade, early educators must base the fundamentals on a child's uniqueness and wide-ranging abilities, on a real partnership between teachers and parents, and provide learning "embedded in meaningful experiences" (48, p. 310).

National movement toward such a definition and restructuring of the splintering world of today was strongly affirmed in the report of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) Task Force on Early Childhood Education. *Right from the Start* exhorts educators, school boards, and community members to recognize that we are "in the midst of a major education reform movement and a major effort to build a new system for serving preschool children and their parents" (55, p. vii). The report calls for the establishment of early childhood departments within public educational systems in order to "provide a new pedagogy for working with children four to eight and a focal point for enhanced services to preschool children and their parents." Additionally, the report emphasizes the need for public educational systems to make linkages and work cooperatively with other domains of early childhood—Head Start, nurseries, child care—to ensure continuity and coordination in the development of the child's thinking, speaking, and acting skills.

This report's dynamic, thorough recommendations have been her-

alded by many leaders in the early childhood field. Tom Schulz and Joan Lombardi, members of the NASBE Task Force, who are also NAEYC leaders, examined the common concerns shared by educators, school board officials and school administrators, and governmental policymakers regarding the conditions of young children today. After reviewing and affirming the recommendations of the report, they conclude:

> For the early childhood community, the NASBE report is significant perhaps less as a course of new ideas and recommendations but rather as an added endorsement for major themes and principles long advocated by NAEYC and other early childhood professional organizations.... As these varied organizations report their conclusions and recommendations, we will hopefully see a broadened base of consensus and support for the principles of developmentally appropriate instruction, active involvement of and support to parents, and comprehensive services as components of all early childhood programs. (64, p. 10)

Some states, recognizing the challenges so well articulated in the NASBE report on their statewide levels, have implemented policies and early childhood programs for young children at risk. Each state has determined somewhat different strategies, exemplified in three West Coast states. Washington has implemented community and/or school-based programs for low-income four-year-olds throughout the state, utilizing state and federal funds. Oregon has chosen to supplement some four-year programs for at-risk children with extensive parent education/support programs. California, which has had four-year education in the public schools for many years, has recently published a statewide report calling for the integration of planning/funding for early education, child care, and special needs populations. In *Here They Come: Ready or Not!* the School Readiness Task Force (12) makes 12 important recommendations for curriculum, administration, assessment, and funding in order to provide developmentally appropriate, high-quality early education opportunities to every four- to six-year-old within that state's diverse population. Action is now being taken to implement such goals. These states and many more are trying to take steps to unify the field of early education to meet the demands of today's world.

The world of tomorrow's early childhood must continue to offer diverse options to families in our society. Yet a vision of a unified field of services of early education, ensuring all the components cited by the California Task Force, would enable children and families to predictably obtain education, care, and assistance of the highest quality from their community's facilities rather than having to search pell-mell through the piecemeal patchwork of programs that have sprung up, responding as well as possible to local need. Diagrammatically the reality of the world

of early childhood today is shown in Figure 2. A vision of tomorrow, however, a world of early childhood that assures each young child of developmentally appropriate opportunities for education, care, and intervention, might appear as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2
Early Childhood Today: Patchwork and Pieces

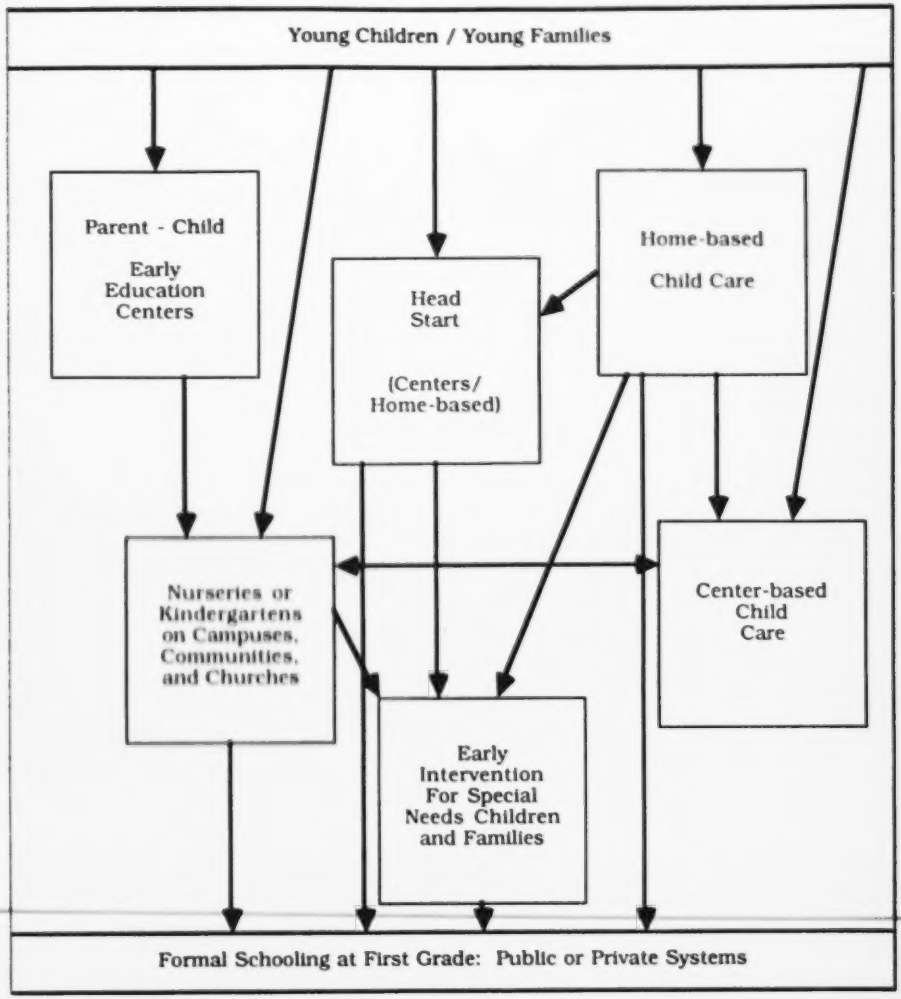


Figure 3
Early Childhood Tomorrow:
Coordinated Choices for Care and Education

Young Children/
Young Families
Home-based Care/Early Education
Parent-Child Early Education Cooperatives
Early Childhood Education Centers In Varied Settings with Allday or Partday Programs
Early Intervention, Head Start and Teen Parent-Child Centers
Public and Private School Systems' Early Childhood Divisions for 3-8 Year Olds
Intermediate Grades: Entering the Formal Learning Environment in Public / Private Systems
Defining Developmental Practices
Professional Organizations:
State And Federal Agencies: Ensuring Developmental Programs

6. DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE

Teachers of young children have agreed with or vociferously added to the descriptions of children of the eighties when I have presented portions of this monograph in workshops and consultations. Today's world presents them with too many young children at the extremes of behavior: the overactive, the aggressive, those feeling constantly threatened by the actions of others; the distrustful and defensive, "king-of-the-mountain" but socially isolated Peteys versus the circling, shadowing, rarely-speaking-their-own-words-and-ideas Seans whose hesitancy and passivity block any underlying ability to take and use new ideas or information effectively. Then teachers tell about the Jeremys they encounter, children who are growing well but are subjected to such a variety of pressures that they come to classrooms vibrating with tensions. Often these children can verbalize the sources of their worries. "Daddy moved out" or "Mom and dad are shouting all the time" or "Pap-pap's home drinking all the time since he's not going to the mill." But the basic feelings—of being a dependent child adrift in a world where adults cannot seem to cope and are not available to moor oneself to during the growing years—teachers sense and must respond to as they work with the growing number of young children in difficulty today.

This chapter examines some of the solutions that can be taken in the classroom, in the school, and in broader social contexts by those working with and those concerned about young lives at risk.

TEACHER AS CHANGE AGENT IN THE CLASSROOM: DESIGNING DEVELOPMENTAL INTERVENTIONS

Whether early educators are working with a child of three or eight years of age, their basic tenet is *to ensure that they view and educate each child as a developmental entity* who needs appropriate placement in an early education setting where *opportunities to learn are offered as developmental processes* and where *empowering adults interact to develop the child's mind, body, and social-emotional domains of personality*. Of necessity, therefore, teachers must examine each child's unique history and current life circumstance. They will have had extensive contact with the family before the child starts in the classroom, and as educators of the young will see the professional's role as building the bridge between the family and the educational institution, a bridge that the young child will, it is hoped, traverse each day with increasing confidence and skill.

In working with family and child, the effective early educator maintains active empathy. If one succumbs to judging a child "bad" or a family "just no good," effectiveness crumbles. Empathy *does not* mean acceptance. Rather, empathy—the capacity to emotionally connect, to intuitively comprehend how someone else's behavior or even life has taken a form so different from one's own—enables the teacher to maintain a teacher-parent relationship with a stressed or hard-to-reach parent. Only then can a teacher effectively support a recovering drug-abusing parent, for example, or a neglectful parent, or one who is so overwhelmed by personal pressures that she/he is unable to see how anxieties are weighting the child's shoulders to the bending point.

If teachers feel the empathic connection endangered and an increasingly judgmental distance building, they need to reach out to their support staff and administration for insight and support. Working with children in need cannot be done in closed classrooms; teachers cannot bear the effort alone. In each of the examples cited in this work, early educators were assisted by social service personnel and administrators. Together, all developed strategies for maintaining the child within the classroom and for assisting the family in stabilizing itself. Such concerted and coordinated effort must be carried out if a teacher's work with a child on a one-to-one basis within a classroom setting is to succeed.

For each child in difficulty, the early educator must develop an individualized program, clearly defining the *gaps* in development that now exist and the *techniques* that will be used to build behavioral patterns or strengthen those that are incompletely developed. It is important to remember that young children often lack stable behavioral patterns or those they have are only half developed. Thus the use of behavior modification techniques that rely on changing established patterns is bound to produce unsatisfactory results. Lilian Katz confronted this so well in her insightful chapter, "Condition with Caution," in *Talks with Teachers* (47). She reminds teachers of the crucial importance of examining causality carefully before intervening behaviorally. Using the children cited in this monograph, for example, we see that a teacher who isolates Petey on a chair outside the classroom and tells him to "think about why not to hit and come back and tell me why" is destined to fail. Petey has grown up in a world where people react unpredictably, sometimes hitting, sometimes "nodding out" in front of his wondering eyes, sometimes slamming out the door. Aggression has been part of the acceptable social repertoire of his world, happening unpredictably but regularly in his life. Petey's teacher must realize that she/he will have to assist him in building new behavioral patterns, taking on a role very much like that of a parent with a toddler who is slowly becoming a socialized member of the family. As the skilled parent does with a toddler, Petey's teacher will

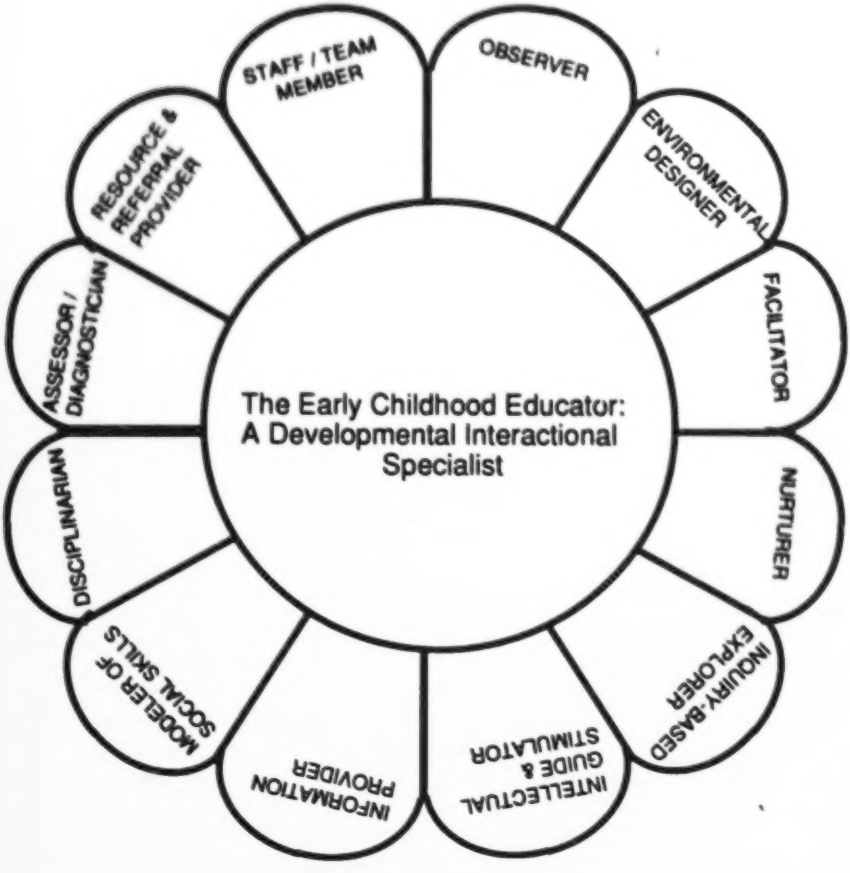
have to set consistent and stable limits and to constantly verbalize the "why" of those limits. The teaching adult will model the behaviors that are desirable for Petey and verbally reinforce those seen in other children and in Petey when he is able to act in prosocial ways. She or he will have to guide, channel, and sometimes redirect his activities as he veers out of control in the minute-to-minute interactions with materials and people in his classroom, carefully maintaining a balance between being too intrusive and controlling—which will prevent him from starting to become self-regulating and independent—and being too permissive.

As Petey develops increasing emotional stability and social skill, his teacher will present more opportunities for age-appropriate challenge: games with competition, skill-building activities done in groups, independent work responsibilities. In the daily work of education and socialization, the teacher will be patiently consistent, realizing that the establishment of prosocial behaviors takes more than months to build. The teacher will try to remember to affirm each attempt Petey makes, and will communicate the steps of the growing process to others—parents, aides, classroom volunteers, support staff in the school—so that all can assist in helping the growing process occur. Of necessity, the teacher will also be a careful observer and recorder of the steps Petey takes, ensuring that progress does occur. And if for some reason progress is not taking place or if regression begins, the observational records from the classroom can be utilized by teachers and support staff to assess the situation and see if referral to a specialized classroom or resource facility is needed.

The role of the early educator is of necessity a complex one. In my work with students in training to work with young children, I emphasize that they will need to become "developmental interactional specialists" and have the capacities to function in 12 different ways, sometimes simultaneously. The 12 overlapping roles of the early childhood educator can be conceptualized like daisy petals around a hub (as shown in Figure 4):

1. *Observer:* To record children's behaviors and to plan group and individual play/learning activities based upon concrete observations.
2. *Environmental Designer:* To provide an effective and stimulating environment that offers children physical, intellectual, and social challenges, and that presents a living, engaging curriculum for active young children.
3. *Facilitator:* To assist in and stimulate the child's day-by-day developmental growth in the multitude of minute-to-minute interactions between child, adult, learning materials, and environment.

Figure 4
The Overlapping Roles
of the Early Childhood Educator



4. *Nurturer:* To provide the child with emotional support and security during early out-of-home experience with others, building an individual's sense of self-worth and self-esteem in the first school enviroment.
5. *Inquiry-based Explorer:* To actively involve the child in the process of discovery and solution seeking as she/he gains new understandings.

6. *Intellectual Guide and Stimulator:* To assist and increase the child's developing conceptual abilities and to encourage verbal and nonverbal expression of conceptual understandings as the child comprehends aspects of the surrounding world.
7. *Information Provider:* To provide children with knowledge about the natural, physical, social, and aesthetic world that facilitates their intellectual growth and independent functioning.
8. *Modeler of Social Skills:* To provide young children with behavioral examples of positive social interaction, with ways to solve social conflicts, and with attitudes of empathetic awareness and understanding of others' physical, social, or ethnic differences.
9. *Disciplinarian:* To provide young children with safe, secure external controls when their internal sense of control is overly stressed.
10. *Assessor/Diagnostician:* To define curricular goals for the age group in school or care, to objectively and sensitively evaluate a child's developmental strengths and difficulties with the defined curriculum, and to constructively work with the child to alleviate problems in development.
11. *Resource and Referral Provider:* To assist children and their families in locating and obtaining necessary assistance, support, or social services from the larger community.
12. *Staff/Team Member:* To effectively support positive staff relationships among all adults—professionals, volunteers, and parents—who are dedicated to the full growth and development of young children.

With children like Petey, the teacher may have to enact more of the disciplinarian, modeler, and assessor roles; with less completely developed children like Sean, the teacher may have to actively initiate more cognitive and inquiry-based experiences, verbal interactions, and teacher-child sociodramatic play situations. Both Curry (22, 23) and Smilansky (68) provide excellent examples of the latter type of intervention, stressing that the teacher must actively function as a play partner with the child. Realizing that Sean does not now possess the internal capacity to make use of the developmentally appropriate opportunities in the early childhood activity areas of building blocks, art, housekeeping, or manipulative toys, the teacher will actively engage in these areas with him. The teacher will use words and movements to draw him into play with other children, stepping back as he becomes more and more capable of sustaining his own ideas and interactions with others. As with Petey, the teacher will maintain careful observational records of Sean's progress over

months of concerted attention to assisting and stimulating his verbal, social, and intellectual lines of development. And if any of these lines of development still seems to be incomplete, the teacher will not hesitate to turn to specialists who can serve as resources for activities in the classroom or provide out-of-classroom opportunities for stimulation and intervention.

Additionally, the families of children who are developing new skills and capabilities may turn to the teacher when stresses in the family's life arise. The teacher then may have to take on additional and more specialized roles appropriate to the situation. I have explored some of these roles and their application to such situations as separation/divorce, moves to new areas, ongoing health problems, or medical treatment with child or family member (25). The teacher thus becomes a link in the social support system for child and family.

To summarize, then, developmental intervention with young at-risk children must include the following steps within the context of a developmentally appropriate environment and curriculum:

1. Obtaining and utilizing a child's developmental history to ascertain the interplay of internal and external factors that have contributed to the current difficulty as well as coping strengths in child, family, or community systems.
2. Identifying current developmental delays or deficits as well as overall growth patterns, developmental strengths, or special skills/gifts.
3. Describing an individualized program of intervention, targeting goals and procedures for reaching those goals within a defined time frame.
4. Planning for ongoing communication and cooperation with parents and others adults in the child's educational and social world.
5. Regular observational recording of the child's changing behaviors with periodic evaluation and conferencing with parents and staff.

Consideration of intervention with children like Jeremy highlights the teacher's dynamic linkage to the larger social, economic, and cultural issues of today's world. In classroom contacts with Jeremy and the many other pressured children like him, the teacher will be vigilant to see the child as a still-developing and vulnerable young life, not to be fooled by the facade of maturity he presents in first contacts. As with all others in the classroom, the early educator will need to critically assess the developmental strengths and deficits, taking the inconsistencies and gaps in his development as cues for intervention. The teacher will need to maintain a balance in interactions with a pressured child like Jeremy between providing the reassurance, support, and approval that will not deflate

his defensively mature stance, and also setting sufficiently challenging expectations and defining limits that he can meet. And when he tries to wiggle or fast-talk his way out of the academic demands of anxiety-provoking situations—situations where he cannot complete tasks independently or perform in front of his peers, for example—the teacher must provide the degree of appropriate support along with the determination that he will be able to complete the task. Doing that will make it possible for him to work *with his teacher* as his mentor and guide, rather than putting this new adult in his life in the difficult position of being either too punitive or too permissive as parents and many other adults have been. It is tricky and time-consuming.

However, the gratification and accomplishment the teacher attains when children in need develop the words, behaviors, and social-intellectual skills that will enable them to become competent and independent learners are inestimable. Having helped *one* child, the teacher gains the inner resolve to reach others. "How much he's grown, how far we've come together!" Early educators describe their pride and boosted self-esteem as they watch their energies and efforts assist in building a stronger human being. Students-in-training as well as teachers in the field can sense this in the accounts of master teachers.

The individualization necessary for quality early childhood education must be provided if children like those highlighted in this study are to make adequate progress and are to establish the prerequisites that will make academic skill attainment possible in the early years of formal schooling. Early childhood groups must be small in size, a ratio of 1:10 children to adult for three- to four-year-olds and a maximum of 1:20 for five- to eight-year-olds, preferably less. Quality early childhood programs often assist the teacher's involvement with at-risk children by providing aides, volunteers, or student assistants in the classroom. These individuals can be important supports in young children's development *if* they have an understanding of the children's struggles and can effectively assist the teacher's interventions. But this, of course, means that teachers will provide a thorough orientation and ongoing supervision to others in the classroom, that they will treat each adult as a team member and build a sense of unity and harmony among all adults working with young children. This, too, takes time, effort, and human relationship skills. But the rewards of a well-functioning developmental classroom where children and adults are engaged in constructive activities in multiple, dynamically reverberating areas are evident in the affective and intellectual growth spurts that are possible in such environments.

The early educator is best assisted in forming a developmental assessment of the at-risk child with information not only from the child's family but also from other professionals who may have worked with the child

previously in classrooms or in home-based contacts. If information from such professionals does not accompany the child into the preschool, kindergarten, or primary classroom, the early educator should contact the other professionals, after obtaining agreement from the family in order to gain a thorough sense of the progress the child has made and the stresses that may still exist. Ensuring continuity and progress in the child's educational and social domains should be part of a collaborative role and function of all early educators.

TEACHER AS CHANGE AGENT IN SOCIETY: ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

Early educators must also function as advocates and activists for young children. They must make the Peteys, Seans, and Jeremys visible to community members and policymakers. Educators who see these inadequately developed and poorly prepared children languishing in academic environments *know* the challenges they present to the schools they will enter in future years. The activist/advocate early educator works to bring concern for and commitment to vulnerable young lives to the forefront in the wider social community.

Realizing the patchwork of early childhood services today, early educators assist families in obtaining needed services, whether in the currently used school or in other programs in the community. Knowing the splintered reality of young children's programs, early educators organize a resource list of available community services and actively build linkages through person-to-person contact and professional organizations. Additionally, they present the professional's perspective of children's needs to parents and community members who may come to rely on their expertise to handle stressful issues such as planning for child-supportive transitions during a family's time of separation/divorce or techniques for easing a young child's adjustment to a new school and community when the parents' employment requires relocation. Early educators also can articulate child development theory and early education practices to community and administrative personnel initiating new services for young children. For example, the introduction of a four-year-old program in a public school system or the initiation of child-care services for nursery-elementary school-age children in a private or public school will be best planned by active involvement of early educators. They can define the goals of the program in developmentally appropriate ways, ensuring that schedules and activities and environments match the developmental levels of the children enrolled. The NAEYC standards for developmentally appropriate practices for young children (5) have been most helpful to

educators in the field; the growing trend across the country for early childhood programs to become accredited through the voluntary process in the Center Accreditation Project of NAEYC shows promise of nationwide application of developmental guidelines. It is the individual teacher who can translate those guidelines into daily practice in work with young children and in contact with other professionals and community members who are concerned for the well-being of the young, particularly those at risk.

The NASBE report *Right from the Start* urges that all public school districts establish separate departments of early childhood for children four- to eight-years-old (55). When this recommendation is positively received on local levels, then early educators will want to ensure that curriculum, classroom, and outdoor play area design, and assessment procedures are all developmentally appropriate to the growth processes and learning styles unique to the early years. Articulation of appropriate practices for early childhood is best accomplished by teachers of the young who can speak to parent groups, appear on community television, and sponsor parent-school events in dynamic, nondidactic ways. Turning to the expertise of a respected professional in early education is easiest when that person is warm, caring, and socially sensitive, as well as knowledgeable and incisive.

For many in the field of early education, the reverses in social policy over the past decade have led to roles of greater activism in working for social and educational changes that would reduce the number of vulnerable lives at risk. The NAEYC publication *Speaking Out: Early Childhood Advocacy* (37), for example, provides concrete advocacy goals and specific steps for working toward better educational and social conditions for young children. Courage, tenacity, and unceasing commitment are required for the needed transformations to occur. Marian Wright Edelman has stated the current situation most straightforwardly, reminding her readers that change takes years of work. She points to more than seven decades of efforts to pass women's suffrage, more than three to pass child labor legislation, and the struggles for equal educational opportunities for minorities and handicapped individuals that are still being settled in the courts. As she observes:

> Being a change agent for poor children, or for anything, means being a good pest, wearing down those you want to do something. And you have a better chance of getting something done if you are specific, address one problem at a time, outline what the person responsible can and should do, have thought through why it is in their self-interest to do it, do not mind doing work for them, and, most important, make sure they can take credit for getting it done. (28, p. 108)

CHANGE AND INTERVENTION ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLICYMAKING LEVELS

Individual efforts are important, often crucial, for helping to articulate children's needs and to change growth patterns in children who lack the prerequisites for academic and social development. But intervention must also take place on broader and more far-reaching levels if young lives at risk are to be helped.

I agree with Bronfenbrenner's analysis (10) that mainstream America during the eighties has shown consistent distrust of national intervention programs to support children and families in need, even though family support programs have multiplied on the grassroots level during the past decade in response to problems within local communities. It appears to this author that widespread concern about local community children in need has resulted in program innovations like those highlighted in this monograph, those described by Schorr (62), and those highlighted in sections of Kagan's work (43, 44). The dynamic and innovative character of American education and social planning has attempted to solve national issues such as inadequate child care and limited opportunities for early education on a piecemeal locally specific basis. In response to even more pressing problems like poverty and all its implications for early development and the vulnerability of America's child-rearing systems, little significant action has taken place. Nor can it take place since this entails changes in economic levels of social planning.

Thus it becomes apparent to early educators and child advocates that the creative strategies of community-level or even state-level action have not proven sufficient to meet the growing numbers of children at risk. Nor will they, given the predictions for the decade ahead.

As the NASBE report emphasizes, administrative and policymaking personnel of institutions involved with young children and their families must form collaborative and mutually supportive partnerships (55). This will begin to transform the splintered picture of early childhood services. Only then will continuity and quality of services to the young and their families be ensured. A national agenda for coordinated education, care, and intervention must be articulated and acted upon in a comprehensive fashion. Coalitions of early childhood programs must be established on local, county, and state levels; coordinated planning must target the gaps in standards, services, and funding mechanisms so that action can be taken to fill the gaps. Three immediate goals should be:

1. The initiation of *one* policymaking body for early childhood on national, state, and local levels, removing the artificial barriers of "care" and "education."

2. The establishment of separate standards of licensing of early childhood programs and personnel, thereby ensuring developmental focus on curriculum and evaluation of programs. Separate certification standards for early childhood educators are a necessity. Jan McCarthy (51) noted in 1987 that only 24 states had implemented distinct early childhood certification, although many have begun this process or have begun to distinguish early childhood as a separate age category. Application of NAEYC's "Teacher Preparation Guidelines" (54) would assist in this differentiating process in states where early childhood has not been fully distinguished. Accompanying this policy-level designation of the uniqueness of early childhood within the broad field of education should also be the institution of separate and specific programs of teacher preparation for adults to work with children, birth through eight years, particularly those young who are at risk or who show delayed development. Again, the NAEYC Guidelines are important in articulating the scholarship, skills, and field experiences necessary for adequate preparation to meet such challenges.
3. Restructuring of education into early (1–8) and middle (8–13) divisions in public and private systems. Each division would provide developmentally appropriate educational programs and child/family supportive interventions as early as needed. It would be the mandate of the Early Childhood division to establish and maintain the child observations and monitoring in order to assure that each child is provided with the prerequisites for academic success. With such preparatory foundations established, early education then builds fundamental skills in cognitive and social domains. For necessary child and family support services undertaken within the school setting, particularly in the early years when small class size and individualized teacher-child-parent communication to accompany developmental intervention with at-risk children is crucial, national funding must assist local efforts. The prerequisites for academic success and the fundamentals of literacy and social empowerment are most needed by those communities least able to afford such costs. Quality early education is expensive. But whether the costs come due now—or in the nineties or not until well beyond the turn of the century—the bill is waiting to be paid by the nation. Investment *now* in the early years ultimately pays off; only children who have been well educated and empowered to participate in this dynamic democracy can function as independent, productive adults and parents in 2000 and beyond.

Individuals in professional organizations and academic institutions can

assist coalition-building efforts to strengthen the definition and domain of early childhood education by articulating the commonalities in goals shared by the traditions of nursery education, child care, early intervention, kindergarten, and primary education. A valued place for each exists in this collaborative effort; all must continue to provide the variety of services for young children and their families. What is needed is not elimination of options but coordination and greater choice of quality services. The trend for public education to take a larger role in coordination and/or provision of service as advocated by the NASBE report (55) and as shown by developments in local school systems around the country is praiseworthy. With this effort must come action on the national level so that our Peteys and Seans may be helped, and systems of developmentally appropriate early education may be established so that pressured, anxiety-filled children like Jeremy will not be pushed harder than they already are. The partnerships that family and school can build in the early years can and should be lifelong, strengthening the social fabric of the nation.

Until coordinated and effective developmental education is provided to all young vulnerable members of society, until provisions of school and social services are set up to ensure that every child obtains the prerequisites for academic success early in life, we will continue to see an increasing proportion of young children in difficulty. The risks for them and for our social fabric as a whole have become increasingly apparent throughout the 1980s. Young children of today will be the adults of the next century. Will they have the strengths and skills needed for that era? Have we ensured them an early beginning that provides each one with equal opportunity for academic success? And do we follow this with challenging opportunities for skill building that affirms a legacy of knowledge that lasts lifelong? Our answers are the actions we take and the provisions we make to help every child attain full growth, to protect every young child at risk.

The Peteys, Seans, and Jeremys of today are the world builders of tomorrow. In the 1950s for every retired American collecting social security, there were 15 employed and productive workers. By the next century there will be only *three* wage earners for every retiree. Will Petey or Sean or Jeremy be ready for adult life in that new technological century, in a society demographically so different from today's world? Will they form caring and connective bonds within their communities, contributing both socially and economically? Or will they drain the limited resources available? What is done today sets the cornerstones for tomorrow's world, readies the future's world builders. At-risk young children must become a national priority and an immediate concern of each citizen within our varied communities and our complex, dynamic country.

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NEA Policy on Early Childhood Education

Resolution C-3. Early Childhood Development and Kindergarten

The National Education Association supports the inclusion of prekindergarten early childhood education programs within the public school system in facilities that are appropriate to the developmental needs of this age group. These programs should include prekindergarten screening, child care, child development, appropriate developmental curriculum, and special education. The Association further supports kindergarten programs that are developmentally appropriate and that adequately prepare the child for transition into first grade. The Association urges that federal legislation be enacted to assist in funding and organizing the implementation of such programs.

The Association believes that early childhood programs must be staffed by trained and certified/licensed personnel and trained support staff. It supports training programs that will lead to credentials consistent with the educational standards in each state. The Association recommends that minorities, the poor, and the elderly be recruited to work in such programs.

The Association advocates the establishment of fully funded, early childhood special education programs. These programs should be readily accessible, make available those services necessary to assist handicapped children from birth, and be staffed by certified teachers, qualified support staff, and therapists.

The Association urges its affiliates to seek legislation to ensure that early childhood developmental programs offered primarily through the public schools be fully funded and available on an equal basis and culminate in mandatory kindergarten with compulsory attendance. The Association supports regulations requiring children starting kindergarten to have reached five years of age by September 1 of that year. (75, 89)

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67